THE GEERING CONTROVERSY

A POLITICAL ANALYSIS

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CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

TABLE

NOTE

1. Books are cited by author and year only if they are listed in full in the bibliography.

2. Journals are usually abbreviated, in accordance with the abbreviations given on p. 153.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This is a study of an ideological conflict within the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand. It is about a controversy which stimulated fiercer debate than the church had seen in its previous sixty years of united existence. It concerns a conflict which at some stage encompassed most of the fundamental doctrines of the organization and involved the participation of nearly all its leading figures. The central personality of the whole debate was Lloyd Geering, principal of the denominational seminary, who found himself at the end of 1967 arraigned before the highest court of his church on a charge of heresy.

This thesis is an examination of the dynamics of that conflict: why did it expand into a full-scale controversy, and what factors led to its eventual contraction? It is also an analysis of the organization of the controversy: what strategies did combatants use in following their goals, and what techniques did others use to conciliate them? But more than this it is an examination of the role of ideology in the whole dispute: how important were ideas to the development of the controversy?

Ideological conflicts such as this constitute an important part of politics. They can be observed at every level of political behaviour from individual adaptation to change[1] to international feuding between superpowers.[2]

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1 E.g. R.E. Lane, Political Ideology (New York: Free Press, 1962), pp.419f.

2 E.g. D.S. Zagoria, The Sino-Soviet Conflict, 1956-1961 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962).

Whenever ideas come into question, or people try to justify their actions in terms of values, there is a potential for ideological conflict. Such conflict is clearly frequent within a wide range of human situations.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The term 'ideology' itself has been used in a great variety of ways. Freud saw ideology as a mechanism for achieving psychological stability through the rationalization, projection or displacement of guilt.[3] For Fromm it produced more of a spiritual catharsis, providing release from the anxieties of the human predicament.[4] Mannheim saw an ideology as a conservative instrument designed to bolster up the status quo,[5] while for Apter an ideology facilitated an 'intellectual and moral leap forward'.[6]

In this study, however, an ideology is seen more generally as a belief-system prescribing norms, allocating values and indicating desirable goals: it provides both general principles on which behaviour 'should' be based, and specific objectives or courses of action.[7] Therefore an ideology might prescribe radical change or proscribe any change at all; it might alleviate guilt feelings or even induce spiritual euphoria. But it need not be defined in terms of such consequences.

Rather, what distinguishes an 'ideology' from a group of merely random ideas or beliefs is that the beliefs

3 Summarized in Herbert Waltzer, 'Political Ideology: Belief and Action in the Arenas of Politics', in Christenson (1971), 1-33.
4 E.g. The Sane Society (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett, 1955).
5 Ideology and Utopia (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1949).
6 The Politics of Modernization (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1967), p.315.
7 This distinction comes from F. Schurmann, (1968), pp.24ff.

comprising an ideology are associated in some systematic way. Because they are derived from general principles they will tend to be consistent, applying irrespective of the private interests of particular actors. Because their range includes norms, values and goals, they will tend to be comprehensive, able to cope with and explain a wide range of possible situations.

But obviously a controversy is never purely ideological, for by definition it goes beyond an impassive exchange of ideas to involve public disagreement and even discord; consequently it may generate emotions quite beyond the control of logic. So while an 'ideology' is a set of beliefs ordered in a systematic way, an 'ideological controversy' can be seen as a public dispute which uses a particular brand of ideas as its currency of conflict.[8] Such a conflict will involve ideas, but it need not be limited to them. One theologian saw this possibility very clearly:

> When there is a controversy ... about something as vital as the meaning of one's existence, people get very quickly disturbed. It arouses emotions and establishes attitudes of antipathy and prejudice which are very hard to overcome in the period that follows.[9]

The theologian was Lloyd Geering. But this perception has been given more systematic expression in a model developed by J.S. Coleman.

Coleman wrote a monograph on community controversies,[10] in which he found that certain patterns of conflict continually reappeared. He therefore developed a 'portrait of the

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8 This metaphor is not of course original. See T. Hobbes, Leviathan, Part I, Chapter IV: 'For words are wise men's counters, they do but reckon by them; but they are the money of fools.'

9 Thursday, December 10 1970, p.31.

10 Community Conflict (Glencoe: Free Press, 1967).

processes' which are normally observed in such controversies,[11] and tried to establish which factors would be likely to limit or accentuate their development.

The issues usually spread from a single issue to embrace new and different issues, and expand from the specific to the general. Coleman cites the case of one Iowa city where a controversy began with a complaint from a local carpenter that a creek had overflowed into his home. Other grievances were soon forthcoming, and more general attacks were made on the city government, culminating eventually in the abandonment of the whole system of local administration.

Another change in the nature of the issues, Coleman suggests, is from disagreement to antagonism. Personal attacks replace dispassionate discussion of issues, and opponents begin to dislike one another personally. This is because, he considers, men have a drive towards internal consistency in their attitudes. They find it easier to see virtues in their allies and vices in their adversaries.

As the issues change, so too does the social organization of the community. With an increase in the antagonism between opponents, there is a corresponding decrease in the contact between them. Meanwhile associations strengthen within each group, where members tend to find mutual reinforcement and support. This polarization is accompanied by the formation of partisan organizations which arise to channel the discontent on both sides. New leaders usually emerge, men often with little previous experience of power

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11 Ibid. p.3.

and without any strong loyalty to the community. In some of the disputes Coleman mentions, especially about desegregation, leaders were marginal members of the community such as outsiders, convicts or young people. In others, notably those concerning city-manager plans, opposition leaders tended to be 'personally frustrated and maladjusted'.[12]

These organizational changes are sometimes accentuated by the inability of more moderate community organizations to take a strong stand on the issues. The unions and the Democratic Party were, for instance, unable to oppose McCarthyism because their memberships were split over the issues. So the extremist group under McCarthy had considerably more influence than they would normally have had.

But this description of the patterns of controversy only explains how a conflict develops: it does not explain why it grows, or conversely why it should stop short of a complete disruption of community life. So Coleman goes on to examine the factors which facilitate the emergence of a controversy and limit its growth.

For an isssue to have any explosive potential, it must impinge on people's lives in an important way or pose some threat to them. Coleman sees such matters as education, economic welfare and religion as meeting this criterion. But for a controversy to develop out of this, it must have a differential impact on the community. A flood would affect people similarly and so would be unlikely to accentuate social divisions. But desegregation of schools on the other hand could divide whites from blacks, parents from non-parents, and could precipitate such a conflict. It is also necessary,

12 Ibid., p.12.

he adds, that those involved feel action can be taken. A prolonged drought would be more likely to induce despair than stimulate protest, while a fluoridation proposal could be defeated by concerted action.

The way such dissatisfaction is handled will depend on the way a community is accustomed to dealing with such problems. It may rigorously suppress any dissident opinions, or it may have built-in means of expressing dissent, or it may force opponents to work extraconstitutionally to achieve change. On the community's style of conflict management will depend, therefore, whether dissatisfaction disappears through co-optation, takes the form of a loyal opposition, or spurs the formation of a revolutionary army.

But a community will react differently in different areas of its life. The first such area Coleman singles out is economic. Any economic crisis will directly affect many people. This contrasts with the 'power' area, in which comparatively few may be competing for office or actively campaigning. The third area, that of values, provides an underlying residue of conflict which may be triggered by a particular issue. A controversy would usually draw on all three 'bases of response' to some extent. Working-class opposition to a city-manager plan may, for example, arise in the 'power' area, where workers sense their lack of influence in the city's administration. But it would probably involve the economic area, where the 'pork barrel' no longer provides the jobs and services it once could; and it may spread to the value area, with the claim that all citizens should have equal access to the decision-making facilities of government.

It is also relevant to note the importance participants give to these three issue-areas compared to the value they attach to their social relationships. Lower status members of society, Coleman suggests, have limited group memberships and are consequently more accessible through certain types of issues: 'those which catch up peculiarly the frustrations and dissatisfaction of persons in a depressed economic and social state'.[13] Higher class participants will be more accessible through issues of a 'value' nature, but are more likely to become involved through organizational ties. This associational involvement would incline them towards upholding community norms against conflict and personal attacks. Lower-status participants on the other hand will be less inhibited by such constraints, and consequently more prone to indulge in personal attacks. The extent of participation has therefore an important effect on the style of controversy, for it helps to determine the relative importance and nature of issues which may arise.

The mass media also affects the development of a controversy. It often has a role in sparking off issues and transmitting opinions. But its persuasive effect is considerably less significant than interpersonal networks and mouth-to-mouth communications. Indeed, in the latter stages of a controversy, the main role of the media is to reinforce opinions that have already been formed in this way.

Thus Coleman gives quite a comprehensive picture of the course a controversy will be likely to take. He indicates some of the forces which may accelerate or limit conflict, and examines the importance of issues in this development.

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13 Ibid., p.19.

But the concept of ideology does not really find a place in his framework. He certainly mentions 'value' issues, yet in the case studies he cites, these values are loosely related and often appear to be little more than rationalizations of economic frustrations or power drives. For Coleman, also, only a few extremists are really 'ideologists'. This may well be an accurate description of the role of ideology in American urban controversies. But it is interesting to ask how the patterns of conflict would be affected if ideology did play a more central part in the development of a controversy? What impact would the inclusion of ideology have on the overall model?

Two answers might be given to this question. The first is that it would have no real impact, that ideology is little more than a smokescreen to cover selfish ambitions or subliminal drives. In this view, people employ ideas not because they believe them (though they might), but because the ideas are useful to them.[14] A few rather naive people can be placated with ideological concessions rather than policy handouts, an Order of Lenin rather than a plot of land, but most would find their ideological convictions coinciding with their self-interest.

The second answer would be that ideology is indeed an important determinant of behaviour, that people do in fact often act on principle. The constant procession of heretics to the stake during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries would suggest that, whatever the psychological motivations of the victims, they certainly believed in their ideology.

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14 E.g. 'Ideologies are embraced because they serve some function - often implicit and unrecognized - for their adherents. They fulfil needs and allay anxieties.' T.F. O'Dea, 'The Ideologists and the Missing Dialogue', in O'Dea (1970), p.89.

So, to discover the genesis of a belief, in this view, is not to explain its impact.

Both of these attitudes contain an element of truth in them. An ideology may provide a ready rationalization for more pragmatic goals, but it may then, in turn, become an important stimulus to action. Stalin, for example, probably used the theme of 'socialism in one country' to ensure his dominance in the power struggle against Trotsky. But he also acted on it, with considerable significance for Soviet society; and in the context of a shattered economy, it was probably a wise policy. In this case both ideological and pragmatic considerations were linked within the one policy. It is only in the specific situation, then, that one can assess the impact of ideology on behaviour.

The Geering controversy can now be examined in terms of Coleman's framework. In making this examination, the study will be attempting to describe the patterns of conflict and explain the organizational activities of those involved. It will then be possible to understand how important ideas were to these developments, and to answer the question of what the role of ideology was in the controversy.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

New Zealand had been involved in doctrinal disputes in one way or another ever since Vergil of Salzburg had been accused of heresy for claiming that the antipodes were inhabited.[1] Controversy was not something new to the New Zealand Presbyterian church either. The last major dispute had lasted forty years, dividing Otago and Southland Presbyterians from their fellow churchmen north of the Waitaki, and preventing union until 1901. The Southern church had been disturbed by some of the more radical innovations of their northern colleagues, such as the sanctioning of marriage to a deceased wife's sister,[2] or the introduction of instrumental music into worship. When it became known for instance that a British regimental band had accompanied the psalms of a Napier congregation, a decidedly unfavourable reaction was reported from the south.[3]

One of the major issues in any theological debate in the church was the place to be given to its confessional standards, especially the seventeenth century Westminster documents, which were largely the work of English Calvinists during the English Civil War. There were some who wanted a clear affirmation of the Westminster Confession, including everything from a description of the Pope as 'that antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition', to the doctrine that some men are 'foreordained to everlasting death'.[4] On the

1 See Russell (1971), p.6.

2 This was considered important enough to warrant special mention in the Agreement for Union, 1901. See the Book of Order, p.152.

3 See Elder (1940), p.163.

4 Chapter 25, Article 6; Chapter 3, Article 3.

other extreme were those who considered that the confession had more historical interest than theological merit. Those inclined towards this view were likely to see the faith as something which must find new expression in changing historical circumstances. These sentiments were verbalized in the basis for union worked out in 1862, the provisions of which were to be continued 'insofar as these ... are applicable to the circumstances of the church'.[5] This was the key phrase on which the plan foundered.

Flexibility in doctrine was finally accepted with the adoption of a 'Declaratory Act' by southern and northern churches on the eve of union. This Act gave ministers and elders liberty of opinion 'on such points in the Confession as do not enter into the substance of the Reformed Faith', but gave the church itself 'full authority to determine, in any case which may arise, what points fall within this description'.[6] It consequently empowered the church to 'formulate, interpret, or modify its subordinate standards', leaving it to the discretion of successive Assemblies to determine what was legitimate for Presbyterians to believe. This was one of the distinctively presbyterian features of the church: it was the courts of the church rather than individual members or past regulations which determined its doctrine.

But there was nevertheless a conviction that the church was 'confessional' in nature: that it found its historical identity given expression in the Reformed confessions, and its historical continuity confirmed by its recognition of

5 Elder, op.cit., p.161.

6 Book of Order, p.99.

the traditional creeds of the church. Therefore confessional standards could not be taken lightly, even though their constitutional status might appear uncertain.[7] Tension arising from this uncertainty - holding the belief that the church was confessional while making the observation that it was not - underlay much of the theological anxiety in the Presbyterian church.

But most of the theological debating had been carried on within the ranks of the clergy. This was quite understandable, since they alone had any real training in the field, and because the church occupied a large portion of their lives. Laymen had traditionally kept their distance from the esoteric realms of doctrinal disputation, and tended to confuse respect for scholarship (on which Presbyterianism prided itself) with theological apathy. So many of the issues fiercely debated in theological colleges did not filter down to the ordinary layman.

However, ministers who were conscious of the 'richness of the Reformed tradition' often forgot that laymen were largely ignorant of it and were unaware of many of the finer points of Presbyterian doctrine.[8] It therefore came as something of a surprise to many of the more theologically sophisticated conservatives to hear some laymen proposing congregationalism in government and espousing Sabellianism

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7 For a good summary of the various attitudes to this question, see G.R. Ferguson, 'The Nature of Confessional Authority', SJT, XXIV (1971), 271-289.

8 The same point has been made about a NSW conflict, where two theologically opposed synods were competing: 'Many of the laity cared so little for the differences between the Synods as to belong to two or more churches simultaneously'. K.R. Campbell, 'Presbyterian Conflicts in New South Wales, 1837-1865', JRH, V (1969), p.246.

in doctrine.[9]

In fact, laymen tended to show far less denominational distinctiveness than their clerical colleagues. The laymen who were to oppose Geering showed a general 'ultra protestant' tendency rather than anything peculiarly Presbyterian. This was partly due, no doubt, to ignorance; but it was also due to the irrelevance in New Zealand conditions of denominational divisions which had arisen in response to historical circumstances peculiar to Europe. This was compounded by a high level of denominational mobility: New Zealanders tended to change their denominational allegiances without much difficulty.[10] Even some of the top laymen opposing Geering had been members of other religious organizations at some stage in their lives. This mobility meant that it was rarely a momentous step for a layman to leave his present denomination: withdrawal was not an option to be countenanced only in the last resort.

PERSONALITIES OF THE DEBATE

> [The techniques for training boxers] can be applied to the training of gangsters or funeral directors, insurance salesmen or Presbyterian clergymen. One important difference is that boxers, on the whole, live in a less delusional world than Presbyterian clergymen, so that the latter require much thicker ideology. (Peter Berger)[11]

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9 Presbyterianism, as a form of government, involves rule by church courts which are hierarchically structured. The national court (called the 'General Assembly') has the final say. Congregationalism on the other hand entrusts this power to the local congregation. Sabellianism was an ancient heresy which identified the Son with the Father.

10 R.D. Arnold, interview.

11 Berger (1961), p.61.

The ideology was not only thick, it appeared at times to be quite impenetrable. Indeed much of the debate was to focus around the question of what the ideology really required people to believe. There was one group, called here 'conservatives', who took a rather narrow line, and had very little deciding which doctrines the ideology required its adherents to accept. This group called themselves 'evangelicals',[12] but were often dubbed by their opponents 'literalists' or 'fundamentalists'. On the other extreme were some 'radicals' who were less keen to tie their faith to particular doctrines. They sometimes called themselves 'liberals', or more commonly, denied that they could be categorized at all. This denial did nothing to deter the conservatives however, who referred to them as everything from 'secularists' to 'unbelievers'.

But the terms 'radical' and 'conservative' are used politically rather than theologically in this thesis: they refer to people who took particular stands on issues and identified themselves with the perspectives of particular groups. 'Radicals' were persons who supported Geering's right to speak within the church, while 'conservatives' were those who accused him of unorthodoxy. Those who refrained from doing either, or perhaps even did both, are considered 'moderates'.

(1) The radicals

> This fool wishes to revise the entire science of astronomy; but sacred Scripture tells us that Joshua commanded the sun to stand still and not the earth. (Martin Luther, referring to

12 The political significance of this theological label has been described by Henderson, (1967), p.94: 'By taking to itself the great name of the Evangel ... (the group) successfully conveyed the idea that to oppose it was to oppose the gospel... They used accordingly to boast that ... they feared not the face of man. This they took to imply that they feared God. In practice it only meant that they went around being very rude to everyone who disagreed with them.'

Copernicus)[13]

Lloyd Geering was undoubtedly the central figure of the controversy, for it was his radical ideas which initially aroused the ire of the conservatives, and it was he who bore the brunt of their attack. Geering was an Old Testament scholar, and considered a brilliant teacher in the subject. He became Principal of Knox Theological Hall in 1962, having served his professorial apprenticeship in Australia. Before entering the ministry he had been trained in mathematics, and later earned a reputation as a 'financial wizard' for helping to extricate the church from one of its innumerable financial crises. He had also been a successful convenor of the committee on church union, although he was noted in Assembly debates more for his ability than his tact.

The 'Moderator of the General Assembly' was the titular leader of the church, holding office for a one year term. During the first stage of the debate the incumbent was J.M. Bates, a Dunedin minister. Bates had written a book on doctrine for the church, which had become something of a classic; and he had served on many committees, including an interdenominational one on church union. He was under fire for being a supporter of Geering, though as moderator he tried to avoid passing judgement on the matters in dispute. But shortly afterwards he wrote the foreward to one of Geering's books, which made it quite clear where his sympathies lay, and during the heresy trial the following year established himself as one of the leaders of the radical group.

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13 Cited in Dunham (1965), p.315.

Another such leader was I.W. Fraser, who would become Moderator in 1968. Fraser was a good theologian, having trained under Karl Barth, but he was known more for his expertise in the finer points of procedure. One of Fraser's sons-in-law, G.R. Ferguson, was also in the radical camp, and would become convenor of the church's committee on international relations. Fraser's other son-in-law would become convenor of the church union committee. This perhaps illustrated the close theological (and social) relationship between radicalism and ecumenism.

But it was from his colleagues in the Theological Hall that Geering was to receive his most active support, especially from such men as T.E. Pollard and F.W.R. Nichol. They acted as a primary reference group for him, giving him their loyalty, and at times even protection. Nichol on one occasion helped to write a strongly worded letter to the Otago Daily Times, denouncing Geering's opponents:

> We believe ... that the real source of disquiet in the Church is not the Principal, but a small vociferous group, familiar with the techniques of mass-communication, determined to discredit the Principal on almost any pretext, and willing to use any propaganda, however scurrilous, to achieve that end.[14]

So there existed in the church a group who were willing to give Geering support, and act together to defeat his opponents.

(2) The conservatives

Xanthias: Oh, we'll soon get rid of them: we can throw stones at them if necessary.
Anticleon: My poor mutt, if you provoke this gang of old geezers, it'll be like stirring up a wasps nest. They've all got sharp stings in their behinds - and they know how

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14 April 1, 1967.

to sting too! They shout and hop around and leap at you like sparks from a bonfire. (Aristophanes)[15]

The most prominent conservative in the nest at the beginning of the debate was A.G. Gunn, who was the leading figure of an evangelical enclave in South Auckland. He was generally considered vocal rather than articulate; but he was an able author, editing the Evangelical Presbyterian (hereafter EP) and other publications of the Westminster Fellowship (hereafter WF). In this capacity he wrote or published articles dealing with a wide range of subjects, attacking everyone from ecumenists to homosexuals, and everything from modern theology to jazz.[16] The contemporary crisis, he believed, emanated from a 'noisy and nasty band of propagandists who sneer at the Bible and the moral restraints it imposes'.[17]

But he was not representative of the WF as a whole. There were some, like A.C. Webster, J.L. Wilson, and C.L. Gosling, who tempered their criticisms with more positive responses.

However, the strongest opposition to Geering came from a group of laymen, who banded together in an 'Association of Presbyterian Laymen' with the sponsorship of Sir William Goodfellow. This group was led in its first eighteen months of operation by R.J. Wardlaw, a successful advertising executive. Wardlaw was a relative newcomer to ecclesiastical politics, (although he had served on an Assembly committee for some fifteen years), and he displayed considerable

15 'The Wasps' Act I, Scene I; in The Wasps, The Poet and the Women, The Frogs, tr. D. Barrett, (Middlesex: Penguin, 1964), pp.46f.

16 In one pamphlet he edited, an archbishop was quoted approvingly as expressing the opinion that 'the confessional reveals the fact that nearly every known lapse of female virtue is traceable to the dance'. Dancing and the Christian, (Manurewa: WF, 1964), p.8.

17 Sex and the Christian, (Manurewa: WF, 1964), p.3.

enthusiasm and energy in establishing the Auckland-based association.[18] As a man of simple faith he refused to accept the argument that only professional theologians should venture an opinion on theological matters. But as an advertising expert, he ensured that his association's opinions did not go unpublicized.

The chairman of the Wellington branch of the association, R.D. Arnold, was a more restrained leader than Wardlaw, and as a university lecturer was considered to lend some respectability to the association. He was chosen as the national chairman of the APL when Wardlaw decided to resign from the church, and followed a lower-keyed approach with greater success.

One minister who allied himself with the APL, but who took a more liberal position, was R.J. Blaikie, a former missionary in Central Africa. Blaikie was considered something of an anomaly by both sides, for while he was opposed to Geering, he was less than enthusiastic about the 'subordinate standards' of the church, which conservatives were using as their basis of attack. However, politically his position was much clearer: he was implacably opposed to the type of theological thinking that Geering represented.

(3) The moderates

> The Rev. Mr Sutherland, after referring to the length of time during which he had been connected with the Church, said that, with regard to the question at issue, he was not prepared to say that he occupied an extreme position on one side or the other ... He did not say that improvements could not now be made, but he did say that they ought to be extremely careful what steps they took in an age remarkable for changes of a decidedly wrong kind. (Otago Daily Times, January 7 1870)

18 It was usually referred to as the 'Laymen's Association', or the 'APL', although more colourful names were sometimes used.

Many of those who were in official positions in the church were careful to avoid taking sides on controversial issues, but they were not necessarily inactive, and many used their influence to try to bring the parties together. One former moderator who exercised a degree of informal power was J.S. Murray. Murray was essentially a conciliator rather than a debater, and was one of the moderates in Auckland who tried to prevent open schism at the height of the controversy.

Moderators and former moderators often assumed the mantles of elder statesmen, and wielded considerably more power than they had been constitutionally endowed with. This was largely through the impact of their personalities and their powers of persuasion than from any sanctions they might apply.[19] Consequently some were rather reticent in providing leadership, while others were more dynamic. Probably the most influential moderator was S.C. Read, who as Clerk of Assembly was reputedly the best informed person in the church. His moderatorial year was 1967, which coincided with the peak of the controversy, and he displayed considerable diplomatic skill in restricting its expansion.

Others who were highly regarded for their impartiality were I. Breward, the sole Knox professor who would escape castigation as a 'modernist'; L.H. Jenkins, the cautious convenor of the committee on doctrine; and W.A. Best, the man responsible for the passage of business through the Assembly.

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19 As with many other positions of influence, it was the ability of an incumbent to persuade his subordinates, rather than order them, which determined the extent of his power. Cf. R.E. Neustadt, Presidential Power: the Politics of Leadership, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1960).

POSITION OF THE CHURCH IN 1966

While there were long-standing differences between the groups in the church, the occasional disputes which flared up did not involve the majority of church members. Most laymen were quite unaware of any theological ferment, and the majority of ministers had identified themselves with neither extreme. In fact there was a strong belief that such polarization was undesirable and any categorization was improper.[20] Even those who had aligned themselves with one of the extremes were not inclined to precipitate any controversy. Conservatives saw their primary role as one of winning souls rather than engaging in theological polemics, while radicals thought that pluralism in theological matters ought to be encouraged. So, although there were tensions and divisions within the church, the position appeared to be relatively stable. Why then did the theological differences break out into the open and escalate into a full-scale controversy?

Three reasons are suggested for this change. Firstly, some of the more radical ideas which had been widely debated among theologians were beginning to be distilled into paperbacks. This process was associated with the name of John Robinson, an English bishop who had ensured himself a place in the annals of apostasy with the 1963 publication of his book, Honest to God. This book, and the publicity surrounding it, made many people painfully aware of the divergence between popular religious thought and much of modern theology. Robinson himself received attention from

20 See, for instance, L.R. Miller, 'The Westminster Fellowship Within', Forum, XVIII (November 1965), p.3, where he warns his readers that they could not 'pigeon-hole Christians without offending the Holy Spirit'.

the EP editor, who deplored his testimony at the Lady Chatterley trial, in which he described 'the adulterous actions of Lady Chatterley as a "kind of holy communion".'[21]

Secondly, Geering was clearly identifying himself with this process of theological popularizing. This fact was communicated to others in the church in an article he wrote for the Outlook, in which he asserted that 'for the man who has stepped into the twentieth century with his eyes open (rather than for just the theologian), the old distinction between a natural and a supernatural world is a thing of the past'.[22] He went on to contrast a 'modern' world-view with a 'medieval' outlook, and suggested that it might be time for a 'new Reformation'. This meant that many ordinary laymen were now being challenged to rethink their beliefs in a way that they had rarely had to do before. Some felt it was bad taste to air radical views in public lest theologically untrained laymen be influenced. But insofar as Geering had any strategy, it was to bring ordinary churchmen to a greater awareness of theological issues. He, like Robinson, saw his role as that of a popularizer. In his eyes he was not so much a radical introducing new ideas into a theological debate as a teacher passing on the insights of others to his pupils. So to some extent it was not the introduction of novel ideas, but the level at which these ideas were discussed, which created the climate in which a full-scale controversy could develop.

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21 A.G. Gunn, op.cit., p.3.

22 'Is a New Reformation Possible?' Outlook, (September 25 1965) p.17. For other speeches and booklets in which Geering had already developed this theme, see Otago Daily Times (February 24 1961, May 13 1963, October 17 1963); What is our Gospel? Faith and Order Studies: 1963, (Christchurch: National Council of Churches, 1963.)

The third reason for the opening up of the controversy was the inability of the more moderate conservatives to lead the opposition to Geering and therefore control its intensity. This situation really began with the return of Gunn to New Zealand in the early 1960's, which stimulated a new activism and confidence in the conservative group. But it was accentuated by the absence of more restraining influences at the beginning of the controversy. Wilson was in Britain; two former conservative strategists, J.G. and R.S. Miller, had recently been appointed to positions in Australia; and one of the few conservatives left with any real procedural knowledge, D.A. Kirkby, was incapacitated at this time. Blaikie, even if he had had leadership aspirations, would have been too moderate to win general WF support. Thus there was something of a leadership vacuum in the conservative movement. It would be left, therefore, to relative newcomers, less wary of conflict; and to their extremist sympathizers, less concerned about harmony, to unfurl the conservative banner in the confrontation that was to follow.

SUMMARY OF THE CONFLICT

The doctrinal controversy can be divided into three distinct stages:

(1) March - November 1966

(2) December 1966 - November 1967

(3) December 1967 - December 1970

This section will give a brief description of the scope and nature of the controversy within these periods.

(1) March - November 1966

This period of the debate began with an article Geering wrote for the Outlook, which called into question traditional interpretations of the 'resurrection' of Jesus. The immediate response was largely uncoordinated but predictable: conservatives voiced their disagreement, while radicals found Geering's ideas relevant and sensible. At first the debate was confined largely to the correspondence column of the Outlook, and to the precipitating issue of 'resurrection'. But it soon spread to other media and expanded to include new and different issues. Many conservatives began to feel that some sort of action must be taken to limit the publicity given to this radical theology. But more established conservatives were reluctant to attack Geering directly, and so the leadership of the conservative opposition passed to laymen who were less committed to the norms of the organization. They formed themselves into an 'Association of Presbyterian Laymen' and elected Wardlaw their first chairman.

(2) December 1966 - November 1967

During the second period the issues were broadened to include such questions as whether man has an 'immortal soul'; and the debate became more general to include fundamental questions of doctrine. Personal attacks increased, while disagreements became antagonisms. This expansion was partly checked, however, by a moratorium requested by the moderator in April. But the climax was yet to come: in November of 1967, in front of television cameras and before a packed General Assembly, Geering was

formally charged with heresy.[23] The charges were dismissed and Wardlaw resigned. The matter seemed to have been settled with a victory for the radicals and a defeat for their opponents.

(3) December 1967 - December 1970

Despite their seeming failure, the conservatives did not resign en masse. There were many in the evangelical group whose loyalty to the church was greater than their dissatisfaction with some of its decisions. One of these was Arnold, the new chairman of the APL, under whose guidance the association began to adopt more realistic policies. But they were also less exciting, and so the interest of the media began to wane. This enabled the conservatives to keep attention on the constitutional issues which they felt were at stake: they wanted the church to make an unambiguous affirmation of at least the doctrines it considered fundamental. This the Assembly decided to do in 1968, and two years later these doctrines achieved regulative status. Such clarification, conservatives hoped, would assist them in any future attempt to bring deviants into line. This hope was largely realized when, in 1970, the Assembly agreed to 'disassociate' itself from some of Geering's statements.

The third stage of the controversy can therefore be seen as a partial victory for the conservative group. They certainly saw it that way, and at the end of 1970, the APL

23 While the word 'heresy' was not actually used in the charges, it was a fair description of them. Wardlaw accused Geering of teaching 'doctrines...which are clearly doctrinal errors'. Blaikie suggested he could not 'affirm ...his own personal belief in (certain) fundamental doctrines of the Reformed Faith'.

felt secure enough to go into abeyance. But the theological divisions were still deep and many of the scars remained.

CHAPTER III

I. DYNAMICS OF THE CONTROVERSY

At the end of 1966, a major rift divided Presbyterians on a wide variety of issues and with considerable intensity. The purpose of this section is to examine the nature of this split. What features characterized the expanding controversy, and how did the issues develop?

(1) The issues were perceived as threatening

The potential for conflict was already present with an ideological split in the church revealed particularly in church union, but it required the injection of a specific issue to spark it off. The spark came with the publication of an Outlook article written by Geering in which traditional views of the 'resurrection' were challenged. In this article Geering suggested the 'resurrection' was not something that happened to the body of Jesus, but more properly could be seen as a presence experienced by his disciples.

Now, conservatives tended to regard the church as an organization committed to the preservation of certain doctrines in their traditional formulations. If any such doctrines were denied, the basis of the church was, in a sense, being challenged. Therefore the publication of an article such as Geering's was a problem.[1]

But secondly, 'resurrection' was a doctrine fundamental to the belief-system of the church; it could not be considered

1 A particularly clear expression of this attitude to the church was given by an Outlook correspondent (July 9 1966) p.16 who suggests that 'the Presbyterian standards are the Word of God and the Westminster Confession. Those who adhere to those standards are Presbyterians and those who do not are in varying degree not Presbyterian.'

peripheral. Indeed, many conservatives seemed to see it as the key doctrine of the church. Hemi Potatau, a moderator of the church's Maori Synod, pointed out that the first Maori converts to Christianity believed in a bodily resurrection, adding, 'if the Assembly does not believe in this, I want to become a savage again'.[2]

Because it was fundamental, it was seen as inevitably affecting other doctrines. The very coherence of the ideology required that other beliefs would be involved. This is why one critic could suggest that the 'logical end' for Geering's theology was 'sheer unbelief'.[3] The situation was all the more serious because this 'unbelief' had already found a foothold in the Presbyterian church, which had led to ministers 'denying' their ordination vows.[4] Geering was identifying himself with this trend. It was not therefore an isolated error that was being encouraged by Geering, but a whole current of theological opinion, anathema to 'orthodox' Christianity. Unless this trend was decisively reversed, the church itself would be in danger of losing its theological identity. Thus, in terms of Coleman's framework, the issues were perceived as threatening.

This threat was magnified because of the position Geering held within the church. He was, and the fact was continually stressed, principal of the church's only

2 Outlook, (November 26 1966) p.15.

3 Ibid., (May 14 1966) p.15.

4 See, for instance, A.F. Olsen, It's a Scandal, (tract no.5, WF, 1965, p1) 'Men solemnly take ordination vows', the tract notes, 'dedicating their lives to defending and propagating the historic Christian Faith, only to go out into seminaries and churches and repudiate by their teaching and preaching these very vows. This is both immoral and dishonest'.

theological college, and consequently seen by many as a spokesman for the church. This meant that his theological utterances could not afford to be ignored. While the heterodox opinions of an ordinary minister could perhaps be overlooked, those of a theological professor demanded action if the church was to retain its integrity.

(2) The issues become more numerous

Another of the symptoms, Coleman suggests, of an expanding controversy, is an increase in the number of the issues. In this case, a whole range of issues was generated by the controversy, and while some were new, others were part of a long tradition.

One subject which had separated theological factions in the church for almost a century was quickly introduced into the new controversy. This was church union, over which the Presbyterian church was currently negotiating with four other denominations. Fear of doctrinal compromise had always made many conservatives rather suspicious of union, for, as the title of one EP article declared, 'Faith in Christ could be lost in Church Union'.[5] The editor of the magazine, Gunn, saw a likelihood of 'doctrinal reduction' in a united church, which would eventually lead to a situation where 'the most brazen heretic' might be 'hailed as a brave and adventurous pioneer'.[6] These conservative misgivings about union were inherited by the APL which regretted the proposal of the negotiating churches 'to do away with the office of elder and accept the

5 C.L. Gosling, EP, XVI (1966), 227-230.

6 A.G. Gunn, EP, XVI (1966), p.262.

office of bishop'.[7] Even some who were in favour of union saw its future being threatened by the theological disagreements.

> The current ferment in the Presbyterian Church, for one thing, suggests that this church is hardly ready to attempt embracing a wider and more diverse fellowship, without running a serious risk of losing a large number of dissidents.[8]

Another issue which had been discussed in conservative circles for some time, but enjoyed a revival of interest during the controversy, was the problem of 'doubting ministers'. The APL felt strongly on this question, and recommended to 'doubters' that they 'withdraw from Christian service rather than spread their doubts through the church'.[9] However, the APL added a new dimension to the question by relating the recommendation to an underlying anti-clericalism. The unbelief of many ministers was contrasted with the orthodox beliefs of the average layman:

> The search by theologians for a more intellectually satisfying philosophy has not really been for the benefit of doubters in the pews, because few of us have important doubts in this direction, but for the benefit of doubters in many pulpits.[10]

It is therefore left to laymen to uphold the truths of evangelical Christianity.

But the theological unorthodoxy which came from the pulpit was not solely the fault of ministers: it could be traced back to the theological teachers who had introduced them to these ideas. So the APL criticized the theological hall for attempting to silence conservative students,[11] and

7 NZAPL, (hereafter NZAPL) press release, (September 12 1966) p.5.
8 Church and People, (October 28 1966) p.2.
9 NZAPL, p.4.
10 Loc.cit.
11 Wardlaw had suggested that theological students had been forced to take an 'oath of allegiance', preventing them from criticizing their professors. This accusation was retracted under pressure. Press, (October 13 1966).

claimed that most of the recent appointees to theological chairs had been 'men with liberal (or modernist) theological views'.[12]

Appointments to other influential positions in the church were also criticized for the 'unsanctioned modernistic bias' they displayed. A new director of Christian Education had recently been appointed, who had declared an intention to train 'the young generation to be radicals and revolutionaries'.[13] His appointment marked the beginning of a conservative antipathy to the Christian Education department of the church, which continued long after the theological controversy had died down.

Even the official journal of the church came under scrutiny with the criticism that it was slanted toward radicalism.

> Unjust bias is very evident in "Outlook", (sic) our official national publication. Originating articles in "Outlook", if they have a doctrinal bias are, without exception, modernist.[14]

More moderate conservatives tended to share these misgivings about the Outlook's impartiality. Blaikie saw

> a clear indication that the Outlook, although it is the official journal of the whole church, has a definite bias in its editorial policy towards a theological view which many consider to be a radical departure from the biblical Christian Faith, and to constitute a serious threat to the welfare of the church.[15]

This disagreement arose over the decision of the editor to publish four 'articles-in-reply' from Geering, but only letters from his opponents. Blaikie submitted several

12 NZAPL, p.5.

13 Ibid., p.6.

14 Loc.cit.

15 Outlook, (October 1 1966) p.13.

articles for publication, and indicated that he would get them printed in the EP if they were not accepted for the Outlook. The editor expressed his preference for the former alternative.

Thus the issues multiplied quickly, proving thereby a foundation of disagreement on which a full controversy could grow.

(3) The issues become more general

Closely allied with the increasing number of the issues was an increase in their generality. The disagreement soon passed from specific questions about the form of 'resurrection' to the general presuppositions underlying different beliefs on the subject, and the implications following from their acceptance.

One of the key issues here was the attitude to the primary documents of Christianity, the biblical records. Most conservatives spoke of the bible as the 'inspired Word of God' and some suggested that it was 'infallible'. They distinguished this 'traditional view of those who accept complete dependability of scripture' from the 'secular' view which treated 'the scriptures as an indistinguishable mixture of fact and fiction'.[16] Geering admitted that this was one of the fundamental issues at stake[17] and even seemed to agree with the APL's delineation of their respective positions. He admitted that he did not explain the bible 'in terms of inspiration and revealed knowledge' but rather

16 NZAPL, p.2.

17 At one stage he declined a debate with an American fundamentalist on the grounds that they started from different assumptions about the nature of the bible. Press, (January 2 1968).

saw it as being compiled by fallible men and therefore reflecting 'the language, customs and current beliefs of their time'.[18] So both the APL and Geering were in agreement that the issue was one between fundamentalism, which took the bible literally, and biblical criticism, which opened the bible up to historical and literary examination.[19] This was not particularly fair to many of those opposing Geering, who were far from being fundamentalists. But it suited Geering to defend biblical criticism against an unthinking fundamentalism, and it suited the populist APL to defend simple faith against sophisticated doubt.

Similarly, the role of the confessional standards was introduced into the debate. The WF believed that the Confession from which it took its name was an accurate summary of biblical doctrine and therefore to be taken seriously. The APL generally agreed with this assessment.[20] Geering on the other hand, along with many others in the church not considered particularly radical, thought the Confession to be rather legalistic and outmoded.[21] But at this stage the discussion was confined to the merits of the seventeenth century documents; there was as yet no attempt to explore the nature of confessional authority within the church or relate this to the apparently fluid credal position.

18 L.G. Geering, 'The Word of God and the Bible', in What Does the Resurrection Mean: Articles and Correspondence from the Outlook, hereafter WDRM, (Christchurch: Presbyterian Bookroom, 1966), p.29. He also admitted that he could not be certain that Jesus actually said any of the words attributed to him. (Assembly tapes, 1967).

19 See, for instance, Donald Glenny, St.Stephens newsletter, (Christchurch, May 1966), where he tells his parishioners that they 'will have observed that Principal Geering has upset some Presbyterians, mainly in the Auckland area. This only shows how far they are behind in their reading, and how little they know about the New Testament'.

20 R.J. Wardlaw, (interview).

21 L.G. Geering, 'The Westminster Confession, Our Master or our Servant?' in WDRM, p.22.

Some of the implications of the 'new theology' also entered the debate. Some felt that the whole education programme of the church was in jeopardy.[22] Others felt that the role of ministers might be threatened if Geering's ideas came into vogue, and that they might be relegated to the status of 'moral lecturers and undertakers' assistants'.[23] Further implications of the controversy itself were brought up, such as the possibility of a decrease in the number of candidates offering themselves for the ministry, and the harm open conflict could do to the church's image in the community.

Thus the issues were becoming more general as the assumptions and implications of particular doctrinal positions were examined.

(4) The positions became hardened

As the controversy developed, it became harder to maintain a position of detachment. Those who tried to do so were sometimes accused of 'fence-sitting', or 'failing to give guidance' to others. Conservatives tended to stress the importance of doctrinal purity, while radicals accepted a position of theological pluralism. This meant that even to permit a diversity of theological viewpoints, to say for instance that both radical and conservative interpretations of scripture were valid, was to align oneself.[24] As Wardlaw put it, 'Ministers in Auckland who will not make a firm stand

22 An illustration of this was given by one informant, who spoke of an elderly Sunday school teacher approaching him almost in tears after she had tried to tell her class the story of Easter Sunday.
'But it isn't true', one pupil protested.
'Of course it is', replied the bewildered teacher.
'But', came the coup de grace from this Sunday school radical, 'Professor Geering says its not and he ought to know'.

23 Outlook, (May 14 1966) p.14.

24 As Bates found to his cost when he suggested that churchmen should give serious consideration to the points of view Geering was expressing. Auckland Star, (September 15 1966). Gunn accused him of 'virtually commending the opinions of Principal Geering to the church at large'. Outlook, (August 20 1966) p.13.

stand on the matter are willing to share their pulpits with a big question mark.'[25] So there could be little ground between the two positions, even though a large majority of the church's membership agreed neither with Geering nor the APL. This meant that when people became involved in the controversy, they tended to be drawn towards one of the two camps,[26] and a degree of polarization ensued.

The positions could become hardened all the more easily because the strongholds of the groups tended to be isolated geographically from each other. The major participants seemed to lack the moderating influence that personal contact with their adversaries might have provided.[27] This geographical clustering of theological groups was described by one correspondent to the Otago Daily Times:

> It is interesting to note that opposition to Professor Geering's teachings seems to vary in intensity in direct relationship to its distance from Knox College. Around Christchurch opposition is almost non-existent, in Wellington it is articulate, if temperate and restrained, while Auckland seems to be the place where all the noise and ballyhoo is coming from.[28]

One who had been closely associated with the APL in Auckland was Euan Campbell, a future president of the association. He saw a similar picture, but stressed that misunderstandings were reciprocal:

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25 Evening Post, (October 10 1966).

26 See Outlook, (September 3 1966), p.4, where Blaikie makes the same point: 'To allow this situation to continue developing unchecked, with increasing numbers clustering around the lopsided extremes, is to contribute to the already acute danger of a tragic organic division in our church'.

27 This was a moderating factor, at least for more central members of the community, for those conservatives who knew Geering had considerable respect for him, and those radicals who knew Wardlaw could understand his position better.

28 Otago Daily Times, (April 4 1967).

> I believe that Assembly has grossly underestimated the concern and feeling about the Geering affair countrywide and particularly amongst informed laymen in Auckland. It appears that in the south the clergy particularly have failed to comprehend the dismay the Professor's public statements have created in the north.[29]

The growing bipolarity of the conflict meant that participants were being given a choice between two ideological perspectives, thereby simplifying their task of interpreting information. Geering offered his ideas for those who had 'stepped into the twentieth century with their eyes open'.[30] So those who supported him could see themselves as enlightened inhabitants of a modern world in which goblins were confined to fairy stories and cows did not jump over the moon.[31] The APL offered their programme for those who were loyal to the teachings of the bible. Those who supported them saw themselves as guardians of truth holding back the encroaching tide of heresy. Radicals saw the whole controversy as being a domestic dispute between fellow Christians; but the conservatives tended to see it rather as a battle between Christianity and humanism.

Moreover, because the groups disagreed in their definition of the situation, they saw different issues as being involved in the controversy. It is understandable therefore, that Geering should accuse his opponents of 'lacking a grasp of the issues at stake',[32] or that he should 'remain silent on many issues which his accusers believe are

29 Challenge, (December 16 1967).

30 'Is a New Reformation Possible?', Outlook, (September 25 1965) p.17.

31 Some of Geering's supporters ridiculed belief in the supernatural, suggesting that 'belief in magic is something one outgrows', Outlook, (June 25 1966) p.10; and that '(we) cannot go on swallowing outmoded ideas in an age of space exploration and satelites'. Ibid, (October 15 1966) p.15. 'No intelligent person believes, for instance, that the pictorial portrayal of the creation story is literally correct'. Outlook, (July 9 1966) p.14.

32 NZ Herald, (September 9 1966).

of key importance'.[33] For Geering the central issue became freedom of speech, while for his critics it was the need for doctrinal orthodoxy. Thus a fundamental difference in the perception of the issues helped to accentuate the divisions that were already splitting the church.

So church opinion was crystallizing into two loose coalitions, those supporting Geering and those opposing him. It was therefore the extremes of the church who were dictating the terms of the debate, and those who took neither position found themselves almost defined out of theological existence. Blaikie recognized this, and commented that 'the vocal leaders at opposite ends of the church's theological spectrum appear to agree that their two positions are the only ones that count.[34] Even Blaikie soon found that he too had to make a choice.

This polarization can be illustrated in diagrammatic form. While the total 'population' of the church can be represented as a normal curve, as Downs[35] suggests for an ordinary two-party system, those who were actually participating came from (or at least were identified with) the extremes. This was essentially an unstable situation, and liable to survive only as long as the larger middle group remained silent or allowed themselves to be linked with one of the factions.

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33 Sunday Times, (November 12 1967).

34 Outlook, (September 3 1966) p4 .

35 A. Downs, (1957), p.118.

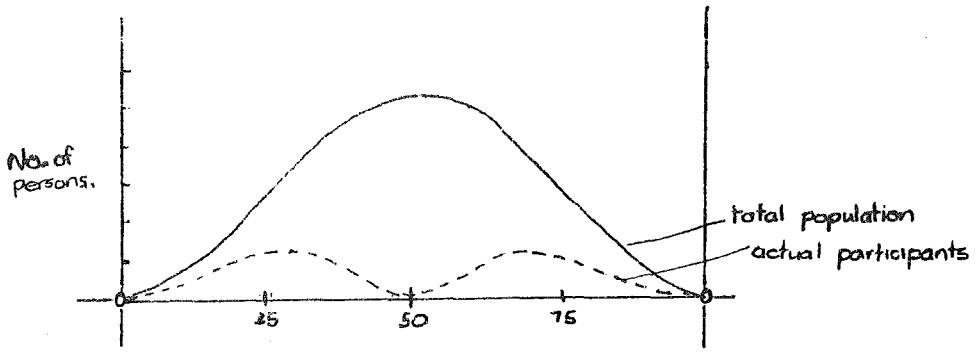

FIGURE I: Distribution of participation in relation to population.

(5) The intensity of the conflict increased

As theological polarization increased, social (and later economic) patterns tended to follow theological alliances. Associations and friendships tended to proliferate within rather than across groups. Wardlaw claimed to have made many new friends during the controversy, largely among 'Presbyterians who hold like me to the fundamentals of their faith'.[36] A radical informant suggested similarly that 'we seemed to mix mainly with like-minded people'. One correspondent to the Outlook said that he had been prepared to work alongside radicals because he thought they had concurred with him on fundamentals. But 'now it seems that this assumption is wrong', and the friendships would have to terminate.[37] Thus people tended to associate with those who shared their theological perspective.

It was in the context of these groups consequently that attitudes took shape and found reinforcement. But the shape and style of these reference groups varied considerably. In some presbyteries, minorities held occasional caucus meetings, while in others small informal discussions were arranged to

36 Auckland Star, (May 7 1968).
37 Outlook, (May 14 1966), p.15.

work out common approaches. Wardlaw, for instance, had frequent meetings with Gunn, which probably helped to formulate some of the APL policy. Morning tea conversation at the Theological Hall Senior Common Room is reported to have been dominated for months on end by news about the controversy, and this professorial community seems to have acted in a supportive role for Geering.[38] These bonds were strengthened when the Hall itself was attacked as an 'odd-ball college of theology',[39] and a second theological college was proposed.[40] So theological reference groups began to emerge to a greater extent than previously, and the mutual reinforcement this provided contributed to an expansion of the controversy.

But there was a reluctance in the church to engage in any sort of personal attack. One leading member of the WF, for example, said that he 'felt rotten' about criticizing Geering, especially because of the position the latter held. This reticence was seen as doctrinal 'flabbiness' by some of the more extreme members of the conservative movement who saw the importance of his position as even more reason to criticize him. It was therefore left to less cautious conservatives to lead the attack, men temperamentally unsuited to compromise and averse to moderation. This in

38 In an APL press statement, Professor Breward had been exempted from the 'modernism' imputed to his colleagues, but he protested strongly about the 'invidious distinction drawn between me and my colleagues', and went on to attack the APL, claiming that 'the truth of God and the unity of the church is not served by press statements which lack even the Christian courtesy of allowing those attacked to reply in the courts of the church'. Telegram, (September 13 1966).

39 R.D. Arnold, in the Evening Post, (November 3 1966).

40 South Auckland presbytery made this suggestion to Assembly in the form of an overture. Blue Book, (1966) 316a-317a.

itself was an important factor in increasing the intensity of the conflict.

Thus the controversy, even by the end of 1966, had considerably broadened in scope and heightened noticeably in intensity. It had now gone far beyond the precipitating issue to include beliefs at every ideological level and to involve participants from almost every theological position.

II. ORGANIZATION OF THE CONTROVERSY

As the controversy expanded, members of the various groups within the church became more aware of the need for concerting their efforts and organizing their energies. The purpose of this section is to describe the nature and extent of this organization and assess its effect upon the course of the controversy.

(1) The conservative groups

The main feature of 1966 from the point of view of organization was the emergence of a partisan organization to oppose Geering. This 'Association of Presbyterian Laymen', as it was known, soon found itself following different policies from the longer established WF. The divergence between the two groups sprang primarily from a difference in the constituency each was appealing to, but it also led to marked differences in the strategies they employed.

The WF was essentially an established conservative group. It was established in that it had acquired a respectable image in the church and worked through the structures of the institution. It was conservative in that its members were committed to preserving traditional

doctrinal formulations and generally opposed to theological innovation. Its most influential members were ministers, and its main appeal was to them. Even its lay members showed a respectful attitude towards the clergy. The fellowship was not then in a strong position to lead any populist opposition to Geering, a minister and member of the theological establishment.[41]

The APL on the other hand was a new association, headed by men with little previous experience of ecclesiastical politics. They preferred to work extraconstitutionally, and to place less reliance on the official channels of the church. This was partly because they were appealing not to ministers, but to the 'ordinary' laymen in the local congregations, men who had been underrepresented in the past[42] and who had been excluded from any real decision-making.[43] This led to an element of anti-clericalism in their attitude[44] as well as a strain of anti-intellectualism[45]

41 There was an extreme group within the WF under the leadership of Gunn which somewhat tarnished their 'respectable' image, but in fact the existence of this group only added to the inability of the WF to lead the conservative opposition to Geering, because the division it caused within the WF created an immobilisme which prevented vigorous action.

42 'Even in the memory of those of middle age, Presbyterian laymen in New Zealand have played a very insignificant part in the life of the Church.' NZAPL, p.1.

43 This reluctance of the church to listen to laymen, the APL believed, meant that the regular channels of the church were not really open to laymen. As Wardlaw put it, 'If we are referred to constitutional avenues to express our concerns the recent decision of the Auckland Presbytery not to overture the General Assembly on the score of theological training...indicates the need for a real lay mind to be known through new channels.' Auckland Star, (September 19 1966).

44 The APL spoke of the 'doubters in many pulpits'; and the 'negotiating ministers' who were responsible for unacceptable proposals for union. NZAPL, pp.4,6.

45 The APL denied it was anti-intellectual, claiming that it was opposed only to the unchristian uses to which learning had been put. But from the point of view of conflict expansion, it was the perception that intellectuals were being attacked which was important. Moreover when Christianity was linked with a fundamentalist understanding of the bible, and 'unchristian' beliefs with a more historical approach, it was understandable that intellectuals in the church should feel attacked.

and an antipathy towards 'the establishment'.[46]

But an avoidance of the routine procedures of the church was also part of the strategy of the APL leadership, who realized the effectiveness of mass communication techniques. Wardlaw, as an advertising specialist, decided to make 'the nation' his 'sounding board'[47] and within two months had spent over a thousand dollars on advertising costs alone.[48] The APL organized public meetings in many towns and cities, which attracted further publicity in the way of local news coverage. These activities stimulated considerable support from conservative laymen around the country.

So while the APL met with some success amongst laymen, it is not surprising that it made powerful enemies in the church. For a policy of anti-clericalism did not endear itself to the clergy, nor did their anti-intellectualism find much favour with academics. If 'the hierarchy' was accused of 'being biased towards unbelief'[49] then it was hardly likely to sympathize with the association's goals. Thus the APL in its very success amongst laymen ensured its failure in the corridors of ecclesiastical power.

But while many of the more moderate conservatives were less than whole-hearted about some of the public statements of the APL,[50] they made little public criticism of the

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46 The APL sought to 'challenge despotic control by the excessively liberal minded', and saw the church as being 'controlled by a hierarchy biased towards unbelief'. NZAPL, p.5.

47 R.J. Wardlaw, (interview).

48 APL broadsheet, 1967.

49 See footnote 46.

50 As Blaikie commented in his parish newsletter (Mangere Presbyterian Church, October 1966) p.1. 'The association could turn into a pressure group for extreme right-wing closed-mind fundamentalism, and result in weakening the resistance to Professor Geering's theological "reformation".'

association since they shared basically the same attitude towards Geering. But they were aware that to maximize their chances of winning support from ministers, academics and the 'establishment', they had to distinguish themselves from the APL in some way. So, rather than silently concur with the APL, a few conservative ministers conducted their own parallel campaign against Geering. Blaikie was the leading member of this group, but he found support from many WF members who were theologically more conservative than him.

(2) The radical response

Since it was only the conservatives who felt threatened, they were the only ones who felt compelled to mobilize. Geering saw himself primarily as an educator, and the appropriate form of education was exposition not organization. As one key radical rather optimistically put it, 'truth is so strong that we don't need to organize'.[51] Even those who rallied to support Geering attacked the policies and goals of the APL rather than defend his beliefs. A Christchurch radical complained to the Press that the policy of the association was stated 'in many cases, in libellous terms as far as ordained men of the Presbyterian Church are concerned'.[52] Another member of Christchurch presbytery saw the formation of the group as a 'vivid example of religious McCarthyism' arising in the church.[53]

Ridicule was one of the techniques used to discredit the APL, who were described by Geering as 'reactionary elements'[54]

51 Interivew.

52 J.K. Nichol, Press, (October 12 1966).

53 I.C. McBride, Ibid.

54 N.Z. Herald, (September 16 1966).

and whose objectives were seen as a 'fabrication of the devil'.[55] A radical reporter for the Reformed and Presbyterian World suggested that the APL members were 'characterized by intolerance and closed minds'.[56]

The conservatives were also accused of indulging in personal attacks. A criticism of Bates for his moderatorial remarks about the controversy, for example, met with a stiff rebuke from one of the radical group:

> Mr Bates integrity was known to all men before Mr Gunn felt led to question it. Let us have no more of this in the Outlook, or in any other publication. It is not decent.[57]

This was one of the radicals strongest strategies, for it was valuable in attracting moderates to their banner.[58] One leading moderate said that the reason they seemed to be agreeing with Geering was that they 'wouldn't be seen dead with his opponents'.[59] This attitude was elaborated in a letter to the Outlook, where indignation was expressed at the attacks made on Geering:

> God preserve us...from the cruel and self-righteous attacks of those who would brand a man as a heretic because he tries to translate the gospel into the language and thought forms of his day, even if he fails.[60]

Radicals generally tried to appear unorganized, and react to the APL with spontaneous indignation. This was also a useful strategy, for it enabled them to deplore 'party spirit' and place themselves about conflict. Organization was seen as a sort of institutional manipulation and was something to

55 Otago Daily Times, (September 14 1966).
56 W.W. Ryburn, XXIX (1966) p.168 .
57 D.M. Hercus, Outlook, (October 1 1966) p.13 .
58 Blaikie recognised this, and commented 'it has usually been those claiming to defend the "secular" interpretation of Christiantity who, when the question of truth is raised for decision, drag in personalities as a sort of emotional sympathy-catching tactic'. Sunday Times, (April 20 1969).
59 In an interview.
60 D.W. Storkey, Outlook, (October 29 1966) p.13.

be avoided. This was the public position radicals adopted: it did not describe the way they actually behaved. Bates, for instance, circulated a petition in Dunedin presbytery expressing support for Geering, and a Wellington radical, I.D. Borrie, tried to form a group of like-minded persons. But the main form of radical coordination was through an informal letter-writing network, which kept theological allies (usually personal friends) informed of latest developments. This type of organization through personal contact was clearly more suited to their strategy than mass mobilization would have been. But the general rationale for not opposing the conservative laymen in a more systematic way was that diversity was something to be encouraged rather than condemned. It was therefore healthy that conservative laymen were sufficiently motivated to express their theological viewpoint through an organization set up to articulate their beliefs. However, by the same token, radical theological beliefs should also be permissible within the church. This was the key question of the controversy for radicals: not whether Geering's theological conclusions were right or wrong, but whether there was a place in the church for such theological exploration. Their style of organization was largely compatible with their stand on this question, although some of the criticisms they made of the APL showed little of the tolerance they claimed to encourage.[61]

(3) How did the organization contribute to an expansion of the controversy?

61 A good example of this is found in the New Zealand Herald, (September 9 1966), where a correspondent pen-named 'Shame' suggests that 'the presbytery should disallow such meetings which show so great a lack of tolerance'.

(a) The more moderate conservatives did not act as a check on the APL, but rather sought to appeal to another constituency within the church. Their actions did not therefore limit antagonisms, but had the effect of increasing participation in the controversy.

(b) The APL mobilized groups of laymen in all areas of the country to oppose Geering, increasing the level of participation, and giving in the process further publicity to his ideas.[62] Moreover, because they were a new group, they preferred to bypass procedures designed to routinize conflict; and their use of mass media and public meetings to mobilize laymen facilitated a rapid expansion of the conflict.

(c) The APL also brought others into the conflict against them in defence of ministerial integrity, academic freedom and presbyterian procedure. These were often people with a professional (or bureaucratic) role in the church, who normally carefully avoided taking sides in domestic quarrels.[63]

(d) The attempt of radicals to define the conflict in terms of a personal attack mobilized many people in defence of norms prohibiting personal attacks.

(e) The mutual definition of the underlying theological disagreement as one of dogmatism vs. tolerance brought some churchmen into a fierce defence of academic freedom, and

62 See, for instance, a letter by G.H. Robinson, Outlook, (April 15 1967) p.14: 'The tragedy is that Mr R.J. Wardlaw has...scattered abroad these very ideas he...considers to be so dangerous.'

63 Harrison saw similarly in the American Baptist Convention that there was normally a 'zone of indifference' to theology on the part of administrators. (1959) p.149.

others into an attack on the permissiveness of a society without clear standards. Both responses increased the saliency of the issues, and augmented the level of participation.

(f) The attitude taken by radicals to the APL was quite unconciliatory, and the description of them as ignorant and reactionary helped to increase the bitterness on both sides.

(g) The way the radicals attacked those who disagreed with them in general rather than just the APL meant that even those moderates who preferred silence were being goaded into action.[64]

III. FACTORS WORKING AGAINST EXPANSION

While the conflict was clearly in a stage of expansion during 1966, there were at the same time attempts made to limit the extent of the controversy. Organizational norms were invoked against personal attacks, and more generally, against conflict in the church. Others accepted the existence of conflict, but tried to routinize it within traditional constitutional boundaries. Indeed, the constitutional, and also the social environment, had some effect on the expansion of the controversy.

(1) Norms were invoked

(a) Against personal attacks.

It was felt by many that personal attacks were impermissible in an organization which boasted love as its fundamental

64 Storkey, for instance, said that he had 'felt hurt' by Geering's implied suggestion that anyone who disagreed with him was 'a sort of theological nitwit'. Outlook, (October 29 1966) p.13.

ideological requirement, and so the APL especially were chastised for making personal criticisms. Some laymen countered this by claiming that the issues were so crucial that the whole organization was in danger and that this justified the breach of charity.[65] However, sometimes the criticism was averted by prefacing critical remarks with the qualification, 'I am saying this in love'.[66]

While the invocation of norms against personal attack had some escalatory side-effects,[67] it did act as some sort of check to the controversy. It meant that the APL tried to avoid, or at least tone down, any personal criticisms. A Press Association report quotes Wardlaw as denying a personal vendetta against Geering,[68] saying that the APL was 'not in any way asking for the removal of Professor Geering from his post as Principal of Knox Theological College'.[69] It also curtailed the desire of of radicals to attack the APL leadership, for as a

65 Wardlaw said that he was sorry if there was 'any bitterness', but they were doing it in the Lord's name. NZ Herald, (September 30 1966).

66 This was not confined to laymen however. See for example, Forum, XVIII (November 1965) p.4: where L.R. Miller, after a scathing denunciation of the WF, adds 'Let us speak the truth in love to each other'.

67 See above, p.45 (d).

68 Other APL members spoke similarly. Before likening Geering to Hitler and accusing him of 'a prostitution of the English language and a mockery of sincere speech', an APL speaker claimed that 'although I will frequently refer to Professor Geering by name and quote from his statements, there is nothing personal in the matter'. Austen Ward, cyclostyled copy of speech, Nelson (December 17 1967).

69 Otago Daily Times, (October 29 1966).

Christchurch minister pointed out, if presbytery condemned the association for its intolerant policies, it would be doing the very thing it was accusing the association of.[70]

(b) Against conflict in the church.

There were attempts to prevent conflict by confining disagreement to the level of a theological debate and avoid the bitterness of a public controversy. This was primarily a radical strategy, since they wanted to have Geering's theology accepted as legitimate, even if wrong.[71]

But the ideal of harmony in the church was also used against Geering. It was pointed out that, whether or not he had intended to, he had upset quite a few people in the church by his Outlook articles. While freedom of speech and education were important, controversy could be harmful to the Christian community. Enlightenment should not be pursued at the expense of unity. It was with these considerations in mind that an unofficial delegation of senior ministers approached Geering during 1966, asking him to refrain from making public statements which could aggravate tensions within the church.[72]

The desire to avoid conflict was shared by some South Auckland conservatives, like J.A.Balchin and J.N.A. Smith. They arranged meetings in which a variety of points of view could find expression, and displayed greater restraint in their writing than either Gunn or the APL.[73] Such

70 L. Jones, Press, (October 12 1966).

71 One Outlook correspondent (July 9 1966) p.15: expressed his hope that 'whatever we think or say relative to the present discussions on Principal Geering's articles we will always remember that we are fellow Christians with him'. But obviously if the conservatives accepted that, they would be denying their whole case, for as one APL leader put it, 'those who can go along with these negatives of secular religion have no right...to call themselves... Christians'. Press, (October 10 1966).

72 According to one well-placed informant Geering did not react very kindly to this request.

73 I. Breward. (interview).

conservatives were conscious of the strands in Reformed theology which placed emphasis on the unity of the church, and the imperfections of the visible church. Since they were conservative they took these elements seriously. Others agreed with this general position, feeling that even if Geering's theology was unchristian they had no right to exclude it.[74] Both wheat and tares co-existed in the church and it was not for them to anticipate the final judgement. Thus, some of the conservative group joined with radicals in invoking organizational norms against conflict.

(2) Attempts were made to routinize the conflict

The intensity of the conflict was somewhat reduced by the perception of the controversy as a routine engagement between old adversaries.[75] It was, according to radicals, a disagreement between those who were up with current thinking and those who had yet to develop a twentieth century approach to Christianity. This was the 'educational' argument: conservatives were potential radicals in need of education. Such education was a continuing task for the church, but one that became particularly urgent at certain stages of her history. This argument blunted the accusations of novelty levelled at Geering, but gave a credible justification for the presence of theological disagreements. Disputes of this sort were therefore quite normal and should not, it was claimed, lead to serious conflict.

Some conservatives agreed that it was a routine encounter,

74 This was the position C.L. Gosling in effect adopted when he suggested that while 'secular' theology was impermissible, it might be a catalyst to something better.

75 But, as with the invocation of norms against conflict, there were side-effects, in this case to stir up old antagonisms and issues not immediately relevant to the current debate.

one they believed between liberalism and orthodoxy,[76] although more serious in this case because of the position Geering held as principal of the theological college. The issue was between those who believed in the fundamental truths of Christianity and those who did not. This was the 'unbelief' argument: radicals were potential conservatives in need of conversion.[77] All the missionary zeal of evangelicalism could therefore be unleashed on unsuspecting radicals. This realization did not diminish the conservative opposition to Geering, but it may have increased their patience.

The professionals of the church also attempted to see the controversy as a routine matter: another item of business to be dealt with as smoothly as possible. This attitude was examplified by the man responsible for Assembly business, W.A. Best:

> (Some), including the Convenor of Bills and business (sic), the Rev. W.A. Best, felt that the debate was not an important one. Though it was stated that thousands of laymen throughout the country were waiting for a reaffirmation of the basis of Presbyterianism, he suggested that other business should take priority.[78]

Doctrinal revision was also suggested to be routine activity in the church; it was not a prospect which should warrant public alarm. In an article in the Outlook, N.F. Gilkison, an Auckland minister, indicated the historically relative

76 See, K. Runia, 'The Geering Case: A Victory for Neo-Liberalism', in New Life, (November 23 1967) p.2. 'The controversy is nothing else than a repetition of the battle between scriptural orthodoxy and unscriptural modernism, as we have witnessed it in the nineteenth century and the first decades of this century.'

77 Some sociologists agreed with this assessment, at least in the American context: 'The liberal clergy (have become) weathercocks turning freely in the cultural winds... In matters of doctrine the liberal clergy has lost its moorings.' D. Bell, 'Religion in the Sixties', in Social Research , XXXVIII (1971) p.460

78 Sunday Times, (November 6 1966).

nature of theological statements: 'There is no perfect statement, as there is no perfect creed or Confession. The church is called upon to revise such statements in language which can be understood, and to clarify its mind on questions about the faith raised either because of false teaching or because of the challenge of new knowledge.'[79]

Thus attempts were made to routinize the conflict by explaining it in terms of perennial tensions within the church surfacing once again, or perceiving the theological issues raised as just another piece of ecclesiastical business.

(3) The effect of social and constitutional environment

Ministers in the church comprised a small community, or rather several small communities, bound together by social ties such as school loyalties,[80] marriage connections and personal friendships. Most had attended Knox Theological College, and almost a quarter had studied under Geering. The smallness of the community meant that any adversary system was frowned upon, and any displays of 'party spirit' condemned. This did not mean that political groupings were unable to emerge, but rather that when they did, they were kept unpublicized.

So both radicals and conservatives tended to deny careful organization, preferring to attribute success to 'the Holy Spirit' and failure to the schemings of their opponents. This social environment helped to reinforce the norms of unity and

79 'What is the Faith?' Outlook, (October 1 1966) p.7.

80 One leader of the APL suggested that they were opposed by an 'old boy network,' which rallied around any of their members under attack. (In an interview). This opinion was shared by another APL member who saw an 'element of the "old school tie" loyalty' in the 1967 Assembly. A. Ward, speech, op.cit., p.4.

harmony in the organization.[81] But those who had been trained overseas were not always part of this small community and were sometimes viewed with suspicion. Blaikie for instance had done his theological training in Scotland and was something of an 'outsider'.

Even the theological divisions that did exist were somewhat reduced by the lack of contact between combatants: family groups and theological allies tended to concentrate in particular geographical areas. Thus Dunedin, Christchurch and Wellington were known as concentrations of more radical ministers, while Mataura and South Auckland tended to act as magnets for conservatives.

It has been suggested that the constitutional environment of the church may have taken some of the heat out of the controversy;[82] that the structure of Presbyterian procedure delayed any hasty action, and gave a breathing space in which the issues could be looked at more dispassionately. It was certainly true that the delays consequent on Presbyterian procedure did provide opportunities for dialogue, but there is little evidence to suggest that either side moderated their position because of it. Moreover, the belief of the APL that the official channels discriminated against laymen meant that they had little real confidence in the procedures.

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81 One example of this tendency to deny organization was given by J.A. Balchin in a letter to the writer (dated 19 November 1973). In referring to the 1970 disassociation decision, which climaxed the most carefully planned campaign of the conservatives in the whole controversy, he suggests, "I really had little to do with this... The matter was quite straight forward and .. was passed overwhelmingly by the Assembly in 1970. As it was on such a basic matter as a denial of life after death it could hardly have gone otherwise."

82 I. Breward (interview) C.L. Gosling suggested similarly that the 'lines of communication' were better in the Presbyterian church than in some other denominations; so the controversy could take place within the more temperate atmosphere of church courts and committees.

However, there had been conscious attempts for some time to ensure greater representation of conservative opinion in the courts and committees of the church[83] and bring representatives of different positions together in this way. This meant that, for instance, Arnold, Blaikie and Geering were all on the Doctrine Committee, while Wardlaw, Gilkison and Blaikie were together on the Overseas Missions Committee. However, the contact this committee work may have provided did little to reduce mutual suspicions in a period of increasing tension. Indeed, one APL leader said that it was from serving on a committee with Geering that he first became aware of the latter's heterodox views.[84]

Thus, while the social environment of the church did something to dampen down the conflict, the constitutional climate only exacerbated the tension that was present.

IV. THE SITUATION AT THE END OF 1966

The year 1966 ended with what appeared to be an acceptable compromise. Some doctrinal statements were proposed for adoption by the Doctrine Committee, and these were accepted by Assembly with only one dissent being recorded.

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83 This was described in the Life and Work Committee Report to the 1967 Assembly: 'Many efforts have been made over the years to keep conservatives in the main stream of our Church's life and work by seeing that on Assembly and Presbytery committees the conservative interest gets ample representation. Conservatives have been specially included in all conferences on Church union...' Blue book, 1967, p.32a.

84 Moreover there were rather strong tensions within some committees. One professor in the Church of Scotland makes this point: 'If there is anyone who has never seen one fellow Christian give another a nervous breakdown or never been present at a meeting of ecclesiastical top brass where the atmosphere could most aptly be described as coronary creating, then he is more fortunate than the present writer.' Henderson (1967) p.5.

Since it was the stated goal of the APL to get a reaffirmation of the church's standards, especially as they related to the 'resurrection', it would be expected that such a decision would find favour with the association. Moreover, because one of their senior members was on the committee, and he seemed happy with the statements, it seemed quite probable that the association would accept the proposals.

The Outlook report on the Assembly spoke of an 'atmosphere of spiritual elation and joy and fellowship' at the conclusion of the gathering.[85] It also spoke of a debate in which there emerged 'a well ordered system fully ventilating the opinions of representatives on every aspect of the controversy'. Even allowing for the degree of optimistic reporting characteristic of an official church magazine, some reconciliation appeared to have been achieved. Indeed, the Clerk of Auckland Presbytery described the result as a 'miracle of reconciliation'.[86]

On behalf of South Auckland Presbytery, A.C. Webster withdrew two clauses on theological education from an overture the presbytery had presented. His assessment of the situation agreed with that of the Outlook:

> We saw in the debate on Thursday that while there were differences, sometimes deep differences, which were vigorously expressed, yet the bond of fellowship, far from being broken, was strengthened.[87]

Geering expressed his satisfaction at the outcome, and

85 Outlook, (November 26 1966) p.6f.

86 Church and People, (December 26 1966) p.2.

87 Dominion, (November 8 1966).

even Wardlaw seemed contented with the result.[88] The latter's brother appeared to sum up the mood of the moment when he said, 'I respect Professor Geering. I also respect my brother. I count them both brothers in Christ.'[89]

However, a verbal compromise over the precipitating issue soon proved to be inadequate to meet the demands of the APL. Three reasons can be suggested for this. Firstly, there were far more issues at stake than just the initial question of 'resurrection'. Even a satisfactory resolution of this issue would not settle the issues or ameliorate the antagonisms that had arisen in its wake. Secondly, conservatives were rather suspicious of the way Geering seemed able to manipulate words to suit his purpose. The test of a compromise formula was therefore not what it said, but what it did: was Geering in any way restricted by it?[90] The newspapers the following morning carried an assertion by Geering that he was not. Thirdly, the conservatives believed that Geering's belief about the 'resurrection' was not just an isolated theological aberration, but arose from an unchristian set of presuppositions. Even if it were possible to silence him on an issue such as the 'resurrection' he would 'break out again'[91] in some other doctrinal area.

88 See Church and People, (November 25 1966), p.3. 'We gather that both Professor Geering and Mr Wardlaw were happy with this, which can only mean that they each have a different understanding of what the words say.' Wardlaw later denied that he was happy with the decisions.

89 Outlook, op.cit. p.7.

90 This type of behaviour, involving the use of a deviant as a negative referent for normality, follows closely the pattern suggested by Lewis Coser in 'The Functions of Deviant Behavior and Normative Flexibility,' AJS, LXVIII (1962): 'The criminal, the scapegoat, the mentally ill, in their diverse ways, allow the group to reaffirm...its moral identity, for they establish sign posts which serve as normative yardsticks....It is against the ground of their deviance that the righteous achieve the comforting affirmation of their normality.' (pp.173f.)

91 One informant used this phrase to describe Geering's introduction of new issues into the debate.

Because of these factors, any formulation which was acceptable to Geering was ipso facto unacceptable (or at least insufficient) for the APL. It was only because they believed that Assembly's decision was a rejection of much of what Geering was saying that they had been partly satisfied. But now they knew better. So the issue was becoming not just one of the church's affirming orthodox doctrines, nor even rejecting unorthodox ones; for Geering, they thought, could escape this net also. It was now impossible for them to avoid attacking personalities. This appeared to be the only way they could stop the radical tide.

So the stage was set for the second part of the controversy. The APL would not be seeking merely a clarification of doctrine. It would be asking for an exclusion of people who refused to conform. Personalities had replaced ideas as the most accurate theological reference points for the subsequent debate.

Thus the momentum of the controversy had carried it to a point where some sort of confrontation was difficult to avoid. For it was no longer winning policy debates or achieving theological goals which primarily concerned the APL. It was defeating an opponent.

CHAPTER IV

I. DYNAMICS OF THE CONTROVERSY

At the beginning of 1967, the controversy was entering a new stage. The APL had become dissatisfied with the results of the 1966 Assembly, and were now beginning to rethink their tactics. However, in March a new issue was introduced into the controversy, precipitated by a sermon Geering preached at Victoria University. The report of this sermon convinced the APL once again of the dangers of 'secular Christianity' and hardened their resolve to press for the removal of its foremost advocate. Consequently, their policy became focused even more openly on personalities. The issues increased in scope and generality, while the level of antagonism continued to rise.

(1) The issues became more numerous[1]

'Prof. Geering starts new controversy', a headline read in the Dominion of March 14, 1967. The following report described reactions to a sermon in which Geering was purported to have denied the 'immortality of the soul'. The inference drawn from this by some of his opponents was that he was rejecting yet another doctrine fundamental to 'orthodox' belief. However, he claimed that he was expounding a philosophy of life found within the canon of scripture, expressed particularly in the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, when he said that 'man has no immortal soul'. But

1 Gunn described this succinctly: 'The period between the Assembly of 1966 and the Assembly of 1967 witnessed the public revelation by Principal Geering that his agnosticism spread far beyond the Resurrection to include such basic doctrines as the Doctrine of God, of Christ, of Prayer and of the Life Everlasting.' Letter to ministers, (January 1968).

the innocence of his intentions had no effect on the outcry which followed.

The Evening Post of March 14 headlined its article on the subject 'Churchmen up in arms over speech denying man an immortal soul', in which Wardlaw was quoted as predicting that Geering's sermon would 'create even greater spiritual distress than his previous utterances.'[2] This was then linked to the question of Geering's place in the church: 'It now seems logical that he will resign his professorship at Knox College and his membership of the Presbyterian Church, whose creed expressed belief in the life everlasting.'

But although Geering did not plan the expansion of the controversy with the injection of the immortality issue, it was soon apparent that the development was politically advantageous for him, for there were theological innuendoes and complications associated with 'immortality' that the APL did not appreciate. He therefore linked the new issue with his previous understanding of the conflict, that it was between people with different levels of knowledge. The 'educational' argument could therefore be used to great effect against the APL.[4] But it caused considerable bitterness[5] and

2 Evening Post, (March 14 1967).

3 Loc.cit.

4 Gordon McLauchlan of the Weekly News had this argument presented to him by Knox staff: 'Theologians at Knox College's Theological Hall ... and many ministers acknowledge what they call "the gap" between the ministry and the laity and they accept their share of the blame ... None of them underrates the need to close "the gap" between the modern theological thought of the ministry and the views of the laymen.' N.Z. Weekly News, (April 10 1967) p.3.

5 R.D. Arnold reacted sharply to the 'educational' argument, suggesting that 'the new secular theologians' were 'only a noisy minority.' He added that 'those who are so lightly labelling us laymen as fools for our views ... should take note of the quality of the scholars who are to share the dunce's cap with us.' Evening Post, (October 27 1967).

brought protestations of scholarship from the WF.[6]

Issues which had been introduced in earlier stages of the controversy continued to be mentioned, albeit in a somewhat revised form. The problem of 'doubting ministers' was again raised, but now specific assurances were being requested. The Christchurch branch of the APL wanted a guarantee that they were 'in no way being deceived by ministers who believe in Geering's views but preach otherwise for fear of upsetting the faithful.'[7]

The question of loyalty to ordination vows was also raised but with a more specific referent. Wardlaw, in hoping for Geering's resignation, noted that 'it would certainly be a welcome development and will enable the church to replace him with a theologian who really believes in his ordination vows.'[8]

It was probably inevitable that sooner or later Geering would be linked with the advocates of the 'permissive society'.[9] The moderator of Wellington presbytery, J.K. Fairbairn, made this association, lamenting that 'at a time when there was so much confusion in the realm of behaviour, it was regrettable that statements were made which would only add to the confusion by tossing aside the faith and belief that had sustained so many throughout the ages.'[10] An editorial in

6 The WF were particularly sensitive to the criticism that conservatism was a by-product of ignorance. When several members of the fellowship received Ph.D's, the EP commented that it 'pointed to the fact that the conservative viewpoint in theology is not incompatible with scholarship.' EP, XIX (September-October 1969) p.10.

7 Outlook (May 13 1967) p.9.

8 Evening Post, (March 14 1967).

9 This relationship is characteristic of conservative religious groups. See for instance, an article by H.J. Ruppel in Sociological Analysis, XXX (Fall 1969), 176-188, entitled Religiosity and Premarital Sexual Permissiveness: A Methodological Note.

10 Dominion, (March 14 1967).

the APL broadsheet agreed, seeing that the same 'radicalism' which was 'seeking to undermine the valid faith of those who accept the teachings of the Scriptures at face value' was also 'eroding the church's ... foundation of morality.'[11]

Education was another issue which had become involved in the controversy early. Geering was now accused of interfering with child-rearing patterns by a correspondent in a Hawkes Bay newspaper, who suggested that Geering was complicating 'matters for parents who are trying to bring up their families in the simple facts of faith and hope as spoken in the Bible'.[12]

The Christian education policies of the church were also out of favour with conservatives and the Christian Education department of the church tended to be regarded as a part of 'radical bloc' with Geering. A March 1967 broadsheet of the APL carried an article by Blaikie criticising 'another attack on vital Easter truths', in which a comparison is drawn between the views of Geering and a study booklet approved by the department.[13]

The whole range of educational policies came into the debate with the APL expressions of concern about the theological education of the church. Renewed appeals were made for a second theological college with a more conservative staff, and the WF proposed providing bursaries for students to complete theological studies in more

11 Presbyterian Laymen, occasional broadsheet, (March 1967) p.2. (hereafter P.L.)

12 Hawkes Bay Herald-Tribune, (March 29 1967).

13 'Last Easter The Outlook carried Principal Geering's message to the Presbyterian Church at large, that though the bones of Jesus may well be decomposing still in Palestine, we need not worry, for we can still fiddle with words and say 'He is risen!' - risen as a change of attitude and outlook in his disciples.
This year the damp squib of this 'secular Christianity' is to burst more specifically in the Methodist and Presbyterian Bible Class Easter Camps up and down the land ...' P.L., p.1.

evangelical institutions overseas.

(2) The issues became more general

The statements of Geering on the 'immortality' issue were seen by some conservatives as but one further step towards a fully-fledged atheism. Wardlaw, for example, was quoted as stating that 'the Professor's denial of man's hope of immortality was a logical extension of the things he had already said in direct contradiction of universal Christian beliefs and the hopes of millions through the centuries and today.'[14]

So it was not just Geering's particular doctrinal idiosyncrasies which were arousing opposition, but the whole direction and basis of his theology. Gunn claimed that 'conservative evangelicals ... view secular "Christianity" as the most dangerous heresy of our time',[15] and saw Geering's theology as an expression of it. Blaikie, in numerous letters, articles, and motions before Auckland presbytery, felt that the underlying assumption of Geering's whole position was a denial of the 'supernatural'. This presupposition, Blaikie believed, put Geering beyond the theological pale altogether: 'If the Church were to accept it as proper or permissible for Christians to deny the supernatural, it would be agreeing that we may abandon the very heart of the Christian Faith ....'[16] The corollary to this, of course, was that Geering was not really a Christian at all.[17] This was made explicit by Gunn who declared that

14 Evening Post, (March 14 1967).

15 P.L., p.4.

16 Outlook, (May 27 1967) p.8.

17 See above, p.35.

'radical liberal theology ... is a different religion, and has no right to claim that it is Christian'.[18] An Anglican critic agreed, adding that 'many of the things Geering had been saying were said by atheists and Communists before the professor was born'.[19]

But some of those who were supporting Geering were also taking their stand on a very general front. One correspondent to the Otago Daily Times felt that Geering's 'knowledge as broadcast now will eventually lead, within, say, the next 100 years to a far, far happier world than we know today'.[20]

This tendency towards generalization of the issues meant that people tended to identify with a general theological position more consciously than before. Moreover, these positions were focused on diverging attitudes towards belief and towards the church.

Conservatives tended to be more rigid in their attitude to belief. They attached a considerable weight to statements of faith, and displayed confidence in the ability of words to convey theological truth.[21] Radicals, on the other hand, were more cautious of doctrinal formulations, but while they seemed prepared to use traditional terminology, they often used the terms in rather different ways from their conservative brethren. They did not identify beliefs with doctrines, but spoke of beliefs as being given 'historical expression' in doctrines. Therefore the use of particular sets of words was

18 P.L., Loc.cit.

19 R.G. Nicholson, Latimer, (January 1968) p.18.

20 Otago Daily Times, (March 23 1967).

21 Some conservatives were well aware of the difficulties in taking such a position. For a thoughtful approach to the question of authority in the bible, see J.A. Balchin, 'Interpreting the Bible,' EP, XVIII (March-April 1968) 13-16.

valid if it helped to promote faith,[22] but the words were secondary to the experiences they evoked and the events to which they witnessed.[23] This priority was illustrated by Geering's attitude to the 'Trinity'.

> I am fond of the Trinitarian formula as it links me with the Church of the past. I would not use the word Trinity because it gets me into more difficulties than it solves. It was a Fourth Century attempt to preserve the Church from error, the framework to hold certain affirmations together. The Christian Church created a framework which served it very well. We have moved so far away from that setting that it does not serve us now. We no longer find it a helpful way of preserving truth.[24]

It was not surprising, therefore, that some conservatives expressed bewilderment at the way Geering could use words without apparently believing what they said. Blaikie expressed this uneasiness when he brought his charges against Geering at Assembly:

> The New Theology, as it is often called, rather than deny some of the doctrines of the Christian Faith which it cannot accept has 're-interpreted' them , quietly giving to familiar words meanings radically different from those they have always had in common use. Those who are not 'in the know' about the new definitions are thus left either confused or misled about what the theologian really means by what he says.[25]

Opinions were also polarized around two different conceptions of the church, based on a divergence about belief. Radicals saw the church as 'a community with a memory'.[26] This

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22 According to Geering in A Trial for Heresy (1968) p.76. (Hereafter A Trial).

23 This is obviously a gross simplification of what 'radical' theologians believed. Some tended to stress the primacy of present experience, decision or self-understanding. Others emphasised the foundation events of Christianity and saw doctrines as an attempt to interpret these events. Most tried to keep a tension between the two.

24 A Trial, p.38. Cf. D. Glenny, Outlook, (June 10 1967) p.9. 'Most Christians who ever give it a thought regard the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity as nonsense ... hammered out ... to prevent us losing our balance.'

25 A Trial, p.64.

26 J.M. Bates (Interview).

emphasis was on the experience[27] of a community through time, and doctrines were to be seen essentially as interpretations of sacral events made by this community. Conservatives, on the other hand, preferred to see the church as a more disciplined organization united by adherence to particular doctrines. Blaikie allowed a fairly wide range of theological exploration, as long as a few central doctrines were assented to. Gunn, on the other hand, suggested that to be a Presbyterian, a person must believe even that the Pope is the 'Antichrist'.[28] For radicals, diversity in theology was a sign of life[29] but for conservatives it was the mark of decay.[30] Because conservatives defined the church in terms of the doctrines it subscribed to, it was a very serious matter if these doctrines were brought into question:

> The time has come when a definite stand has to be made. Either the church comes out firmly on the side of Professor Geering and alters its teaching or it stands by its declared Standards. There is, I feel, no middle course or compromising stand when dealing with matters of faith.[31]

27 Cf. the views of an unidentified 'ageing scholar' from Knox: 'Everybody seems to think that the Christian Faith is a set of rules. It's an experience; and this Christian experience is the same as it has always been, but it can be expressed in the modern idiom'. N.Z. Weekly News, (April 10 1967) p.4. (Emphasis added.)

28 See a letter by Gunn in the Outlook of February 19 1966 p.13. where he criticises someone for denying that the Pope was the 'Antichrist', for, he argues, 'if she is Presbyterian she has accepted the Confession of our church, and so believes the same'.

29 See Newsletter, First Church, Dunedin, (n.d. 1966) (Hewitson Library) 'Most Presbyterians believe that it is healthy for the church to have within it a variety of viewpoints and opinions because this variety leads to growth.' And contrarily, as Bates put it, 'It would be an indication of decadence in the church if there could not be careful, substantial reconsideration of even the most fundamental points of Christian doctrine.' Auckland Star, (September 16 1966).

30 Eg. E.J. Norton, The New Hebrides Presbyterian Church, typed mss., p.7. 'The vitality of a church is a reflection of its adherence to standards.' See also Djuro Vrga, et al. 'The Relationship of Religious Practices and Beliefs to Schism', Sociological Analysis, XXX (Spring 1970) 46-55, where the authors suggest that those who are 'schismatic' have a narrower conception of the church. J.K. Hadden, (1969) similarly sees in American Protestantism a clash over the nature and purpose of the church.

31 Outlook, (April 15 1967, p.15).

Very little distinction was made by the APL between what was 'legitimate' and what was 'true'. For them, if the church permitted particular beliefs to be held, it was giving official sanction to them. The opposite position was taken by J.M. Bates:

> This church, which is merged together not by statements of faith, but the action of the Holy Spirit in Christ, is surely big enough to allow for a broad spectrum of theological interpretation. ... The views that have been expressed by Professor Geering are not necessarily the views of all of us. They're not the views which everybody in the church is being asked to subscribe to. But they are a proper thing to have in a church.[32]

Thus the contending parties appeared to be not only divided on the content of the organizational ideology; they seemed divided on the nature of the organization itself.

(3) The ideological differences were accentuated by the controversy

While there were deep differences apparently dividing the groups, these were considerably exaggerated by the combatants. Blaikie, for example seemed to have misrepresented Geering's position somewhat:

> (A point) from Mr Blaikie ... in connection with the doctrine of God. I find no difficulty myself in saying that God has acted, in fact a lot of what Mr Blaikie said I am very happy with really. I wonder why he doesn't think I am happy with it.[33]

But Geering similarly misunderstood many of his conservative opponents, treating them as rather uneducated fundamentalists.

However this mutual misrepresentation was not deliberate malevolence on the part of the adversaries; it was probable

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32 Assembly tapes 1967.

33 Final reply by L.G. Geering to his accusers, A Trial, p.109.

that they actually believed the stereotypes they had formed of their opponents. Rather such stereotypes arose, as they generally do, as groups tried to achieve some degree of ideological consistency.[34] In this process negative attitudes to opponents tended to be reinforced, while positive attitudes to one's own position were rewarded.

Incoming information was consequently screened by loyal members in terms of the stereotypes. When Geering made a statement, Blaikie usually saw is as a further denial of the 'supernatural' or, if it appeared to be orthodox, an ambiguous deception. When Wardlaw made a statement, Geering saw it as either an expression of a pre-scientific world view, or an attempt to simplify complex matters. So participants met new arguments with already prepared answers.

In fact opponents were often far more in agreement than they were prepared to admit. This discrepancy arose however because the group reinforcement process encouraged participants to emphasise the points they had in common with their allies and the points at which they disagreed from their adversaries. The effect of this distorted selection of facts on a debate has been well described by Kung:

> A polemical statement of truth ... runs the risk of being understood merely as a denial of an error. It thus necessarily ignores the kernel of truth contained in the error. This statement of truth thus becomes a half-truth; what is says is correct; but what it does not say is also correct. From the point of view of the person who makes it, it refutes the error at which it is directed; from the point of view of the person to whom it is addressed, it

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34 See, for instance, R.R. Blake and J.S. Mouton, 'Comprehension of Own and Outgroup Positions under Intergroup Competition', JCR, V (1961), 304-310. For a more comprehensive analysis of the process of social reinforcement see R.J. Lifton, Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of 'Brainwashing' in China, (Middlesex: Penguin, 1967).

> fails to refute the truth. To the former it seems - rightly - to be true; to the latter it seems - not wrongly - to be false. In short, because a half-truth is also a half-error, the two parties fail to understand each other. Each clings to his truth and sees the other's error.[35]

One visiting theologian, who happened to be a leading English conservative, saw this tendency present in conservative attitudes to Geering:

> Geering's account of the Resurrection of Christ ... is controlled by a strong conviction of the reality of the living, Risen Christ. It is, perhaps, not always recognised by some of his critics that they share this basic faith with him.[36]

Thus the social changes brought about by the controversy stimulated the development of stereotyping and misperceptions, which in turn deepened the divisions between the groups and contributed to further expansion of the controversy.

(4) The conflict intensified

As the scope and generality of the issues increased, and more people became involved, the conflict itself became more intense. It became seen as an 'either-or' struggle with one group or another apparently destined to leave the church altogether. Wardlaw said that he would resign his church membership unless Geering was censured: he was 'prepared to sever connections with the church unless the situation created by the assertions of Professor L.G. Geering was corrected by "appropriate discipline".'[37] From the other side as many as a third of the ministry may have resigned if the decision went against Geering. A writer for the Sunday

35 H. Kung, Infallible? An Enquiry, tr. E. Mosbacher, (London: Collins, 1971), pp.140f. Emphasis added.

36 A.R.C. Leaney. 'History, Resurrection and Redemption', in WDRM, p.31.

37 N.Z. Herald, (May 8 1967).

Times estimated their number at about 200, and an Outlook columnist added, 'I am sure he was right in saying that the entire faculty of the Theological Hall would have been among them.'[38]

As well as social reinforcement of cleavages,[39] there were financial pressures which were exerted in support of ideological positions. The Sunday News of March 26 1967, claimed, apparently quoting Wardlaw, that 'influential lay members may stop offerings to the church if no action is taken against Professor Geering over his claim that the soul is not immortal. ...'[40] But the preferred policy of the APL was to engineer the departure of radicals from the church rather than to withdraw financial support from its enterprises. In a personal statement, Wardlaw made this explicit:

> The Church, as property, belongs in permanent trust to those who hold the traditional view of its founders, and to be absolutely honest, those with the New Theology should establish their own new Church and prove the merits of their theology.[41]

The intensity of these divisions in turn reinforced the ideological differences, giving to each issue a ideological importance far greater than it would normally carry. Routine matters tended to become microcosms of the large controversy. The extent of this was illustrated in the report of the Life and Work Committee to the 1967 Assembly:

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38 D. McEldowney, Outlook, (December 23 1967) p.14.

39 Outlook, (December 23 1967) p.6.

40 Cf. N.Z. Herald, (March 31 1967) where Wardlaw, in a letter to the moderator claimed knowledge of 'parishes where giving had been halved through the diversion of funds following the activities of Professor Geering, and we believe this to be a natural outcome of his teaching'.

41 Sunday News, loc.cit.

> (Friction) arises in Christian education where the Assembly approves and recommends one syllabus, but many Churches prefer not to use it. It arises in vacancies where a parish seeks or rejects one they consider to be a party man. It is seen in a lack of mutual confidence revealed in debate where a motion is spoken to and voted upon, on the basis on what it is thought to imply, rather (than) on what it actually says. It is seen in the sometimes deplorable way that ministers speak of each other and parishioners speak of their ministers. It is seen in the hundred and one more or less visible, more or less underhand ways that ministers, Sessions or people lay down the law, jockey for position, lobby or obstruct.[42]

The polarization underlying this friction can be illustrated diagrammatically, by using a graph Coleman developed in his monograph.[43] When a community is well integrated, the discord arising from conflict will be absorbed relatively equally at every level of political life. In terms of the church these would be at the individual, small group, parish, associational and presbytery Assembly levels. This can be represented:

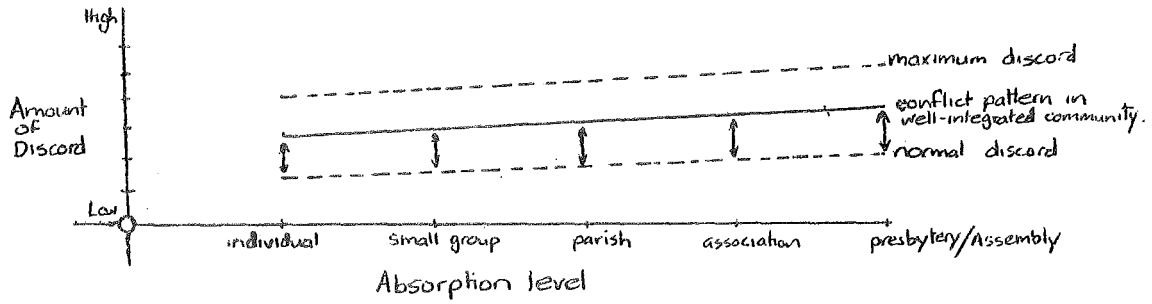

FIGURE II: Normal patterns of conflict absorption.

However when the church began to polarize, there were fewer individual uncertainties and greater consistency within groups. The main source of conflict consequently was between groups at the local and national level. This would be represented:

42 Blue Book, (1967) p.31a.

43 Coleman, op.cit. p.23.

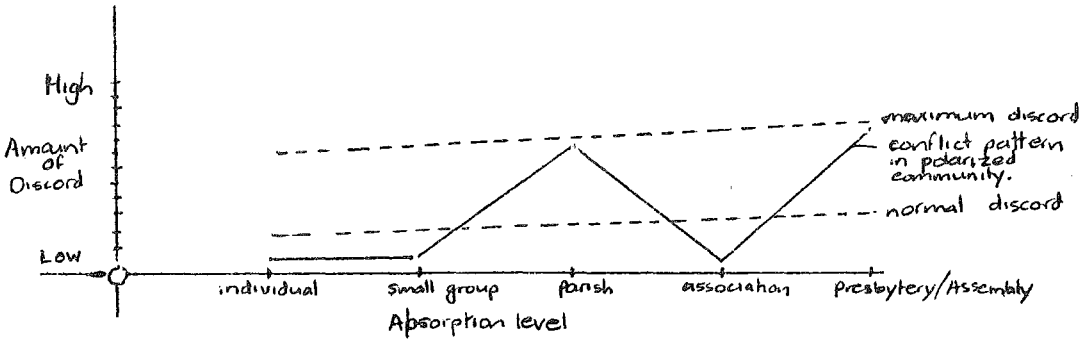

FIGURE III : New patterns of conflict absorption induced by controversy.

With mutual reinforcement of prejudice and internal solidarity that this polarization provided, the social base was firmly laid for an intensification of the conflict.

(5) Disagreements become antagonisms

Closely related to the expansion in the intensity of the conflict was an increase in the personal antagonisms between opponents. The APL made no secret of its intention to leave 'no stone ... unturned to secure Professor Geering's resignation or dismissal',[44] and any other minister who deviated from 'orthodoxy' was also liable for criticism. There were even tentative steps taken by the association to press heresy charges against one Auckland minister in presbytery and libel charges against another in the courts, but nothing eventuated. These were in line with the association policy of making 'marked men' of those who promoted 'unsound doctrine through the Church'.[45] But it was Geering who remained in the forefront of their attack. His beliefs were seen as 'a cancer which must be removed',[46]

44 Outlook, (April 15 1967) p.11.

45 P.L.p. 3 .

46 Press, (November 30 1967).

and he was given what was described as 'a trial ... by a process of public clamour'.[47] He received a volume of hate mail, including a prediction that if he did not keep quiet, he would be dead within six months.[48] Wardlaw similarly received anonymous letters and threats. Another APL member spoke of reactions to his claim that the church was following a 'double standard':

> I have received public condemnation from ministers for pointing out these inconsistencies. I have asked for a reasoned explanation. The only response was the receipt of a very abusive letter from a local minister.[49]

But as it was politically more expedient for radicals to appeal to the norms of the organization against personal attacks, they tended to indulge in less public name-calling than their opponents. They had a tactical advantage here, for the APL had to make credible a distinction between singling out one man's theology for severe criticism and a personal attack. This advantage could have been partly lost when radicals exploited personality weaknesses of APL leaders to win policitcal arguments. They mentioned the fact that some association leaders had not been Presbyterians long, or had been members of fundamentalist sects. They spoke of APL members 'having secret girl friends' or dabbling in subliminal advertising'.[50]

S.C. Read, who was both Clerk of Assembly and Moderator, was subjected to accusations of partiality from both

47 Outlook, (June 11 1966, 11).

48 N.Z. Weekly News, (April 10 1967), 2).

49 A. Ward, duplicated letter to Nelson/Marlborough Presbytery, (October 13 1970).

50 This process has been described in S. Anthony, 'Anxiety and Rumor', JSP, LXXXIX (1973), 91-98, who suggests that anxieties tend to stimulate the growth of rumours.

sides;[51] but while the APL, because of its mass base, tended to print its criticisms,[52] their opponents made their criticism less polite but more private. Indeed, most of the rumours and apocryphal stories were transmitted from mouth to mouth, and rarely appeared in print. So since it was the appearance of being aloof from making personal attacks which was important, the radicals managed to gain political points without restricting their style.

But these antagonisms were not confined to participants in the national politics of the church. For the real strength of the APL lay in men who knew nothing of national decision-making, but played a role in their local parish. The intensity of the conflict in particular areas therefore depended on the personalities involved. In Auckland the intensity was greatest, with militant leadership and active members. In Christchurch, 'malcontents'[53] were largely confined to one parish, while in Dunedin they had very little impact. Two Timaru leaders of the association resigned from the church in early 1967, apparently because they did not feel that 'there was (any) hope in the local situation'.[54] (Emphasis added). The presbytery had just expressed its

51 This tendency to react with antagonism towards an impartial judge has been described by Blake and Mouton, op.cit. The authors suggest that conflict produces distortions in perceptions of participants in favour of their own group, and consequent misperception of their opponents' position. So from the perspective of these distorted understandings, the 'impartial' arbiter is thoroughly biased.

52 They suggested that the 'don't panic' call by Read was 'an echo of the unfruitful soothing noises made to us Presbyterians during the controversy on Resurrection truths', and were afraid that 'our Moderator is being a little naive in expecting that the full text of Principal Geering's address will resolve the dangerous doubts he has created'. Supplementary letter, to P.L. (March 1967).

53 This was a term quite frequently used by ministers who were unsympathetic towards the APL.

54 P.L.p.3 .

hope that the matters in dispute would be 'freely and fully discussed without rancour by people in the spirit of love and tolerance'.[55] This was of course directly contrary to what the APL desired. The association did not believe that Geering's theological views were proper things to discuss in the church, at least not without guidance as to the errors contained therein.

Thus, personal attacks, sometimes with a regional flavouring, helped the disagreements dividing theological factions to flourish into antagonisms. The first stage of the controversy had seen a beginning of this; the second saw the development of it, as the bitterness and tension continued to grow.

(6) Publicity contributed to an expansion of the conflict

While some of the most bitter personal attacks were confined to the interpersonal level and to unpublished criticisms, there was nevertheless a wide variety of publicity channels which were used to propagate opinions, disseminate news and mobilize support. But there was differential access to the official publicity channels of the church. The conservatives believed that the Outlook discriminated against their point of view, and lost confidence in it. Blaikie managed to have some of his articles published in the EP, others published in an APL magazine, and distributed yet others privately to members of Auckland

55 Timaru presbytery showed its sympathies even more openly the following month, when it adopted a resolution declaring that it was 'gratified to know that apparently a large body of laymen refuses to be led by this association and directs that this resolution be read from all pulpits within the bounds'. Timaru Herald, (May 13 1967).

presbytery. This forced him even more into the conservative camp, as conservatives were the only group who seemed prepared to publish his articles. The APL used the efficient facilities of Wardlaw Advertising Agency to turn out broadsheets, newspapers and information leaflets. They also made direct statements to the press, which tended to antagonize some members of Auckland presbytery. Many of their accusations were considered libellous by their opponents, such as the suggestion that the Theological Hall staff 'marked down' conservative students. But the APL achieved widespread distribution of their material, and the fact that it came in for criticism only increased its impact.

Radicals, on the other hand, could more easily use official publicity channels to their advantage. The Outlook printed little controversial material after the 1966 Assembly,[56] although through the Christian Education department material was produced which tended to be rather liberal. But it was often through local publications that the strongest political criticisms came.

One such publication was the Friendly Visitor, a Timaru parish magazine which adopted a rather unfriendly attitude to the APL. The assistant minister of the congregation, J.A. Elvidge, saw the trouble coming from a 'vocal lunatic few', and suggested that their 'denials and denunciations seem ... little short of pious blasphemy'.[57] His senior minister

56 But it was still held responsible for the controversy by some people. One correspondent claimed that '"the Outlook" deserves the main credit for the Geering dispute, as a result of its former editorial policies'. Outlook, (December 9 1967) p.24.

57 Friendly Visitor, (November 1966) p.4.

agreed, claiming that they were 'a kind of disease which could spread easily into other communions.'[58]

Sermons however were the traditional vehicle of clerical influence, and various informants spoke of their 'giving guidance' to their parishioners about the issues in controversy through the medium of their sermons. Not all laymen, however, appreciated this guidance. Wardlaw once interrupted his minister in mid-sermon when he heard himself being accused of being a 'literalist' and accepting the Westminster Confession as 'divinely inspired'. He told the minister to 'stick to the truth'.[59]

These tensions were exacerbated by mass media interest in the controversy, which naturally highlighted the newsworthy aspects of the conflict. 'Theology', a Zealandia report regretted, 'has now been added to murder and mayhem as the legitimate target of the daily press'.[60] A Dominion reporter, who admitted being a 'born again believer', (i.e. theologically conservative) was responsible for the initial publicity given to Geering's sermon at Victoria University, and for drawing him out on the implications of it in discussion afterwards.

As well as the newspapers, the medium of television contributed to the escalation of the controversy, or rather acted as a catalyst to such escalation. It focused very much on the personalities involved and provided coverage of the heresy trial as well as a debate between Geering and

58 Ibid., p.3.

59 Auckland Star, (November 13 1967). It is debatable how much 'guidance' was really given. See Stark, R.: 'Ministers as Moral Guides: The Sounds of Silence', in Glock (1973), 163-186.

60 Quoted in D. McEldowney, Outlook, (May 13 1967) p.11 .

Wardlaw under the skilful probing of Austin Mitchell. In his television appearances, Geering was known more for his incisive debating techniques than for his diplomacy, and Wardlaw had difficulty coping with this intellectual brilliance. But it seems that television acted mainly to confirm and entrench opinions that had already been formed in the context of primary reference groups.[61]

The media also helped to spread the controversy far beyond the confines of the Presbyterian church. Reporters found it made good copy to ask members of other denominations for their reactions to selected extracts from Geering's latest statement. A Catholic bishop, asked to comment on Geering's 'immortality' sermon, claimed without reading or hearing the sermon, that 'for anyone to say these things in the guise of a Christian is to be ignorant of what a

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61 All of the informants questioned on this matter had their previous opinions reinforced by watching these programmes. Radicals usually saw Geering as the victor, while conservatives saw Wardlaw as a brave fighter against the arch-apostle of unbelief. See, for example, a comment by G. Kerr (an Australian fundamentalist): 'When the television and radio networks asked for public debate with Professor Geering, the elder R.J. Wardlaw was left to face the public alone, debating with a man skilled in the wretched art of double-talk'. Separatism: The End of the Road, tract, Auckland, Bible Truth Society, (About December 1967). This tendency for new information to reinforce already formed views was described by Geering in his defence at the trial: After mentioning Blaikie's criticism of him, he continues: 'There are no doubt others present in the Assembly who share these convictions of my guilt. Let me say to all such at the outset that I think it unlikely that anything I say today will reverse your present convictions. On the contrary it is probable that everything I say will serve only to confirm your convictions of my guilt.' A Trial, p.71.

Christian is'.[62] The AOG[63] Superintendent, with a similar lack of information, believed that Geering's statements were 'typical of the modernists who had attempted to explain away the truths of God's Word'.[64] The Selwyn Society of the Anglican church also denounced Geering's theology, and used the doctrinal differences of the Presbyterian church to attack church union. Even the Rationalists Association was drawn in, offering to pay £1000 to anyone who could prove to their satisfaction that the human soul was immortal.[65]

II. ORGANIZATION OF THE CONTROVERSY

As the conflict expanded, the strategies of the groups developed and their organization underwent various changes in response to the strains of the controversy.

(1) The conservative groups

(a) Strategies

During 1967, the APL came even more into the forefront of the conservative movement, as they were the one conservative group who had committed themselves to an unambiguous policy of opposing radicalism wherever it appeared in the church. While this ultimately involved removing modernists from the Theological Hall and making 'marked men' of any other radicals in Presbyterian pulpits the first step in this strategy was to get Geering removed, or at least disciplined. It was this task that the APL were largely concerned with during the year.

62 Evening Post, (March 14 1967).

63 The AOG (Assemblies of God) were one of the main pentecostal sects in New Zealand.

64 Dominion, (March 14 1967).

65 Auckland Star, (March 16 1967).

But in order to effect this, it was now necessary to work within the structures of the organization to a much greater extent than previously. The petition they had presented to the 1966 Assembly was essentially a protest, and could be dealt with by the creation of a committee. But the attempt to get Geering censured was considerably more serious, and required setting into motion formal procedures which culminated in the General Assembly being turned into a domestic court. This meant that the APL were changing the constituency to which they were directing their attention; it was not to the dissatisfaction of conservative laymen they were now appealing, but the sense of justice of an ecclesiastical tribunal.

Moreover, because they already knew the extent of their support and had subsequently developed a lengthy list of members and sympathizers, they had no need for the large public meetings they had organized the previous year. Wardlaw also refrained from making public statements after laying his charges. The association therefore tended to abstain from extra-constitutional activities, such as had antagonized many inside the church the previous year. Indeed, the only real organization the APL undertook after April was to prepare and distribute information sheets to keep their members informed of the latest developments.

But the success of their strategy depended not only on a diplomatic silence on the matters coming before the Assembly. It also required a judicious choice of tactics. They seemed to have little chance of success unless such tactical planning was carried through carefully. This would

involve lobbying influential churchmen who were unesasy about Geering; forming alliances with those who shared some of their policy positions (anti-establishment feeling, anti-intellectualism, opposition to church union, desire for more 'balanced' teaching at Knox, and regional distaste for Otago theology); preparing motions to win support from neutrals; and trying to establish themselves as a 'respectable' group within the church. But the APL did almost nothing to enhance their chances of winning, and seemed unaware of the informal preparatory work that accompanied Assembly decision-making.

This lack of tactical planning was partly due to a belief that the WF would organize the Assembly procedure for the conservative side.[66] But the WF were rather divided amongst themselves, and were not fully in sympathy with the goals of the APL. In fact, they did little to help the APL at the trial, giving the association the feeling that they had been 'let down'. Nor was there any more coordination between Wardlaw and non-Auckland members of the association on tactics. This led to the beginning of a rift between the Auckland members of the association and the others, although at this stage there were no open expressions of this divergence. In private, however, several Mataura APL members admitted they were 'very angry' with Wardlaw over one such issue.

Thus, although the APL had formulated some sort of strategy, involving concentrating on Geering, they had not

66 Presbyterian Witness, publication of the Presbyterian Fellowship, (June 1968)p5 .

developed the tactics necessary for ensuring a successful outcome.

However, Wardlaw's decision to press charges against their common opponent reduced Blaikie's chances of achieving his goal, which was primarily to discover what standards the church had that it was willing to use. For the emotional context of a heresy trial was not conducive to the dispassionate theological discussion which would have been necessary for any such doctrinal delineation. Nevertheless, in order to prevent a situation in which all non-fundamentalists would be thrown into the Geering camp, he decided to use the judicial procedures of a trial to try and accomplish his constitutional objectives.

But in order to do this it was necessary to distinguish himself very clearly from Wardlaw. He would have to establish that his case was not a personal one against Geering, and that the doctrines he saw as central were indeed accepted as vital within the Reformed tradition. However, he made tactical mistakes in both of these attempts. His first was to accuse, in effect, Geering of dishonesty.[67] This made it difficult for him to deny that he was involved in a personal vendetta with Geering. Even in a book review which he wrote for the Outlook (during the time when such matters were supposed to be sub judice) he made a critical remark about Geering which did not go unnoticed. His second tactical mistake was to emphasize the 'supernatural', a belief which was not regarded as particularly vital by many

67 His charge no.1, (A Trial, p.20) was a quotation from the Doctrine Committee report, which both Blaikie and Geering had agreed to. Juxtaposing this with a quotation from Geering implied that Geering did not really believe the Doctrine Committee statement.

in the church.[68] Moreover, he tried to define what was the 'substance of the Faith' himself, which was regarded as disloyalty to the Westminster Confession by those who were more conservative, and as audacity by others more moderate. Both of these tactical errors annoyed some of those who were generally sympathetic to the idea of supplementing or replacing the Westminster documents with something more contemporary. However, Blaikie had not tried to gather together any sort of coalition under his leadership, and had deliberately avoided being identified with the WF. He was, rather, hoping to win by reason what he had neglected to accomplish by organization. But his reason lacked the tactical discretion necessary to overcome the organizational deficiencies.

So, despite the enormity of the task of trying to convince the church to convict the head of its own theological college for heresy, no real attempt was made to work out tactics or mobilize influentials in support.

(b) Policy dilemmas and their effect upon expansion of the controversy

Much of the failure of the conservatives can be traced to dilemmas in their policy which they were unable to resolve. This led to a degree of organizational strain, and an inability to select tactics suitable for a successful realization of their goals.

68 E.g. Outlook, (July 8 1967)p.14 , where G.R. Ferguson replies: 'this is not the way in which the Reformed Faith has traditionally thought of God ... the expression is not normally used in our tradition because we conceive God and man as essentially related to each other'. Also Dominion, (October 12 1966), where J.A. Allan criticized the APL for their use of the term 'supernatural'. He said that the statments, 'being proposed by the laymen were very amateurish. "God a supernatural being, indeed", he said.'

(i) Organization or determinism

There was a tension between the ideological intimation that God's truth would inevitably win, and the organizational necessity to mobilize support for their vision of the truth.[69] This meant that any planning or deliberate strategy had to be justified in some way. The only reason for organization that the APL could see was that some people might not be aware of the desperate situation the church was in, but this justified only the transmission of information not the aggregation of power. So they developed no comprehensive justification for the presence of organization. Nor did they develop any real organizational machinery other than a publicity network. This did not eliminate altogether any chance of success for it was still possible to translate publicity into power,[70] but it certainly made it very difficult. Thus their greatest mistake was to believe too much in the justice of their cause and too little in the political means necessary for its accomplishment.

This had the effect on the controversy of increasing the bitterness involved, for the APL were not forced to take more conciliatory stands in order to cement alliances or influence neutrals. However, the effect was not unambiguous, for it led to a diminution in the threat they posed to others, for they had not organized themselves in such a way that they needed to be taken seriously. This led to a stabilization of the conflict at a fairly high level of bitterness

69 This was a dilemma that faced many a group who wanted to change society in a particular direction. In the Russian revolution, it was solved by the Leninist concept of a 'vanguard', in which the revolutionary elite had control of the state until the 'false consciousness' of the masses was overcome, and the state could 'wither away'. Notice here also that organization was an unfortunate, but temporary, expedient necessary until true doctrine had been established.

70 The classic example of this was given by Fidel Castro in Cuba.

but with the APL very clearly in a minority position.

(ii) Conservatism or reformism

The APL claimed that it was merely upholding the present standards of the church; that it was holding fast to a tradition that others were straying from. But at the same time they were objecting to traditional patterns of Presbyterian activity such as lay subservience, theological diversity and movement towards church union. They wanted to show that they were not the innovators, but at the same time refused to accept the status quo, with its 'hierarchy biased towards unbelief', and 'despotic control by the excessively liberal-minded'. The most clear example of this tension was the way many of their number were in two minds about the Declaratory Act. On the one hand they accepted it as a traditional document of the church, but on the other hand they disliked the theological freedom it gave radicals. This resolved itself into a conflict between loyalty to the church and distaste for the theology it seemed to be permitting.

This dilemma led to a tactical conflict between the desire of a new partisan group to employ modern advertising methods and the wish of a conservative group to use the more cumbersome procedures of the church. They had to establish that they were upholding the traditions, but they were unwilling to follow the traditional styles of action.

Their justification for preferring more populist methods in their campaign was that they were representing the common people against the establishment, as well as orthodox theology against some temporary aberrations. This might have

been true, but in terms of influencing the decision-makers, it was not particularly relevant.

The effect of this dilemma on the expansion of the controversy was that it kept it at a fairly high level. For it annoyed professional theologians and administrators to be told that the APL were the real guardians of Presbyterian belief and practice.

(iii) Purity or democracy

The APL claimed that it represented the purity of the faith against an encroaching tide of apostasy. But on the other hand they also attempted to be a populist movement representing the laity of the church. There was therefore a tension between these two responsibilities: a vision of the truth and a constituency. This meant that they were caught between a tendency to be exclusive (with a rigid doctrinal base) and a desire to be democratic (accommodating the wide range of lay opinion in the church). In resolving this dilemma the APL avoided the temptation to develop a consensus theology, which its democratic pretensions required; and chose instead the politically unrewarding path of ideological purism. This further diminished their chance of creating any lasting impact on the church, and reduced the seriousness of the conflict.

The WF were also divided to some extent on this question. There was a tendency to be elitist, accepting the view of their confession that 'some men and angels are pre-destined unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death. These angels and men, thus predestined and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and

their number is so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished'.[71] On the other hand, they also tended to be rather egalitarian, suggesting that anyone who believed and was 'born again' could find salvation. The former opinion was labelled 'Calvinist' and the latter 'evangelical' or, a derogatory term, 'Arminian'. The political significance of this division was that the 'Calvinist' strand invoked them to accept their minority status within the church or at least within society. The 'Arminian' strand on the other hand encouraged a more optimistic attitude, and suggested that it might be possible to completely change the power alignments of the church through a spiritual renewal. As one informant suggested, 'Nothing would please me more than if Mr Geering became a true Christian'.

In times of possible success there was a stress on the more optimistic evangelical side of their policy, such as during 1967. However, when they failed, such as at the end of the year, they became withdrawn and even more conscious of their minority position. Thus when the conflict was in a stage of expansion, their optimism helped it to expand; but when it had begun to contract, they contributed also to its contraction.

(2) The radicals

(a) Strategies

The style of the radical organization during this period was largely dictated by the conservative charges against Geering.

71 Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter III, Article III.

The goal of the radicals consequently was to get Geering exonerated. They had previously urged their opponents to make these formal charges to give both parties a chance to state their case. However, it was in their own interest to offer such encouragement, for Assembly procedure was a field in which radicals had considerable expertise. The format of a heresy trial was also favourable to them because the word 'heresy' itself had all sorts of emotional overtones, and made their definition of the conflict as one of freedom of speech more credible. They could, and did, suggest that the conservatives were trying to stifle the Holy Spirit breaking forth into new forms of expression.

Their tactics were carefully matched to their objective, and involved preparing acquittal motions, organizing speakers and working out the most effective arguments. There were three main groups involved in this activity. The first group was mainly from Dunedin, and included Bates, Nichol and W.R.M. Hay. Their major aim was to achieve as unambiguous and speedy an acquittal as possible. The second group came from Auckland and included Murray, Baragwanath and Gilkison. Their major emphasis was the pastoral concern that they felt should be shown for both sides in the controversy. The third group involved Breward, Ferguson and Fraser, who believed that the charges should be referred to Dunedin presbytery, as the court to which Geering was primarily responsible, ensuring that both parties would retain their rights of appeal to Assembly. None of these groups were really in disagreement; indeed, their ideas were worked out in consultation. But they did have different emphases. It was generally felt that since the main

pastoral damage had been done in Auckland, it should be left to Aucklanders to stress this aspect of the situation. And naturally, because the Dunedin group were personal friends of Geering, they should be most concerned with ensuring the dismissal of the charges. At the Assembly itself, the main debate was between those who supported Bates' motion and those who preferred Murray's 'pastoral' amendment. This gave Wardlaw the (quite accurate) impression that 'the only motions put and discussed were those designed by the Principal's many friends to exonerate him'.[72] These tactics met with success, and Bates' motion was passed in an amended form, with Murray's amendment being referred to a Drafting committee commissioned to draw up a 'pastoral letter' to local parishes.[73]

(b) Policy dilemmas and their effect upon the controversy.

As with the conservatives, the radicals were confronted with several dilemmas, which affected their strategy and limited the intensity of their contribution to the controversy.

(i) Truth or variety

There was some tension between the quest for truth and the encouragement of variety. With a belief in the importance of searching for new understandings and insights and developing contemporary expressions of the faith came a tendency to discredit those who clung to the older formulations and refused to think through their faith. This sometimes led

72 Challenge, (November 18 1967) p.7.

73 This comprised Murray himself (as Convenor), Bates, Fraser, Gosling, Wilson and two laymen.

to an intolerance for more conservative points of view, which could degenerate into ridicule or condescension. One radical informant believed that some conservatives 'couldn't tell the difference between a theological point and a bull's foot'. But on the other hand, radicals tended to believe that there should be a diversity of theological views permissible in the church, and toleration of a wide variety of theological understandings.

This dilemma led to some degree of tactical confusion, for while Geering often took a debating posture towards the APL, pointing out their deficiencies, heresies and logical inconsistencies, some of the more pastorally-minded Auckland radicals were telling the APL that there was a place for them in the church and that their contributions to the debate ought to be heeded more seriously. These two positions were not inconsistent, for it was quite possible to tell somebody that their position was legitimate, but wrong. However, the APL could not make this distinction because they did not believe in a 'permissive plurality'[74] of theological opinion. They tended to feel that if their particular theological position was not accepted, say by Assembly, then it was being rejected. So they had to choose between being welcomed as representatives of but one of the many valid theological positions in the church, and being rejected as remnants of an unenlightened past. In fact, of course, they could accept neither option, for they were not prepared to be part of a spectrum on which radicalism also appeared.

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74 P.L. p.2.

This dilemma made radicals more cautious, for it made them aware of the two quite contrary strands in their ideology, and provided some check on intolerance. Even those who agreed with the truth of a statement had therefore also to weigh the wisdom of it.[75]

(ii) Unity and honesty

A second dilemma was between the desire to permit full freedom of expression and the need to preserve harmony in the church. Geering tended to stress freedom of speech, while bureaucrats stressed the unity of the church. Others felt that both were important and it was desirable to preserve a balance between the two. Bates, for example, believed that while radicals should not 'abandon anything that is true' neither should they 'throw oil on the flames'.[76] A compromise was reached during 1967 with the moratorium, in which freedom of speech was permitted but no coverage by the secular news media.

Radicals had generally resolved this conflict between unity and honesty by keeping quiet about their own beliefs.[77] Thus, it came as something of a shock to many in the church when they learned that some apparently conservative ministers

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75 This was why there was little support for a motion put forward in Christchurch presbytery in May by a young radical, E.B. Stewart. His motion claimed that Geering's interpretation of scripture was more accurate than that contained in the Westminster Confession. While some may have agreed with this, it was not considered a wise thing to say, so the motion lapsed for lack of a seconder.

76 Interview.

77 One example of this habit was given by an Evening Star columnist. (The minister replies, April 24 1967). 'I remember well an old blind man in one of my former congregations telling me that if I ever denied the historicity of the book of Jonah he would leave the church. I didn't approve of his manner of demand, but he was old and frail and loved his church with very real devotion. I therefore never preached on Jonah in his hearing.'

in the church believed some of the things that Geering was saying, but had refrained from introducing it to their preaching for fear of disturbing the faithful. As one former moderator put it, ministers on their ordination 'promise to preserve the peace and unity of the church, and they practise it in a big way'. The controversy had the effect of making many ministers less reticent to express their beliefs, which in turn increased the anxiety of others in the church, stimulating them to rethink beliefs they had previously taken for granted.

(iii) Innovation or continuity

Geering was regarded by the APL as both a theological vandal and a product of a decadent establishment. He was introducing dangerous innovations into the church, and yet represented trends which had for some time been dominant amongst the 'hierarchy' and in the halls of theological learning.

But they were not alone in their uncertainty about Geering. His own attitude displayed much of the same sort of ambiguity. On the one hand he saw himself as part of a long tradition dating back to 'the patriarchs and prophets, the apostles and reformers'.[78] And yet he wanted to suggest that twentieth century man had entered a new 'secular' world which was separated by a chasm from the world known to his forefathers. How could he reconcile the competing claims of innovation and continuity?

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78 A Trial, p.98.

He had a choice between two strategies. One way was to accept the creeds, but translate them into 'twentieth century' terms. Salvation could become 'liberation into a new dimension of life'; God could be translated into 'that which concerns us ultimately'; sin could be seen as 'alienation from one's highest values'. This strategy involved changing some unpalatable Christian doctrines into more culturally acceptable concepts. It was often called 'demythologizing', stripping the underlying truth of its mythological covering, in order to make it more intelligible to 'modern man'.[79]

The second strategy involved identifying oneself with the direction these ideas were pointing in, thereby reducing doctrines to expressions of faith which were limited to their historical milieu. Thus the fact that the Hebrews believed in a personal deity was less significant than that they had, in a world overpopulated by supernatural beings, reduced god-belief to a minimum. The proper concern of theology, in this view was not with continuing to pay lip service to particular sets of well hallowed phrases, but rather with

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79 Brendle observed this phenomenon in US churches: 'In a denomination where the clergy are extremely well educated they may accept a literal statement but have extremely elaborate symbolic or sociological interpretations of that acceptance, because it is central to their theological stance.' Book review of J.K. Hadden, op.cit. in Sociological Analysis, XXXI (Spring 1970) p.584.

seeking to understand the traditions these words were part of.[80]

Geering was generally accused of following the former strategy. In fact he tended more to follow the latter.[81] He saw the major tradition of the Old Testament as one of 'secularization', and found this congenial to twentieth century man.[82] He believed that the modern world, like that of the ancient Hebrews, was moving away from acceptance of the 'supernatural', and towards a more 'secular' view of reality. So he recommended this ancient perspective to his contemporaries. He adopted, that is to say, the classical 'strategy of return', which radicals from Mo Tzu to Hobbes had espoused before him.[83] Geering could therefore claim legitimacy from the past without being bound by its theological formulations.

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80 The difference between these two theological perspectives can be summarized as follows: the former was concerned with trying to discover the underlying truth veiled within the historical 'containers'. (E.g. Schweitzer, My Life and Thought 2nd edition, (London: Allen & Unwin 1957); 'The ideal would be that Jesus should have preached religious truth in a form independent of any connexion with any particular period ... (But) his religion of love appeared as part of a world view which expected a speedy end of the world. Clothed in the ideas in which he announced it, we cannot make it our own; we must reclothe it in those of our modern world view'. p.53. The second takes the historical situation far more seriously as in some way normative for the present.

81 He claimed, for example, that 'we must look for the direction in which the faith of Israel was moving, not for the mythological remnants still present in its expression'. Geering (1968) p.152.

82 For a sociological comment on this claim, see Hans Mol, 'Religion and Competition', Sociological Analysis, XXXIII (Summer 1972) 67-73. Mol says that 'one of the grave mistakes made by many theologians and clergymen is to presume that Western culture (is) inexorably moving towards a non-religious, secular view of reality and that around this view new social forms will crystallize'. (p.67). He sees a greater plurality of beliefs than ever before: from an ascetic fascination for mysticism to the hedonistic pursuit of orgasm.

83 See Pocock, (1971) for an analysis of this strategy.

The awareness of this dilemma between innovation and continuity had two main effects on the development of the controversy. Firstly, it encouraged radicals to explain novel ideas in more orthodox terms. Pressure was put on Geering to speak 'positively', to rephrase radical speculations in traditional language. This helped to alleviate fears that he might be saying something new. Secondly, it annoyed many more perceptive conservatives, who realized that Geering was not really using words in what they considered a straightforward way. He could 'identify himself' with doctrines, without necessarily agreeing with them. Moreover, his argument about the direction a tradition was pointing in, concealed a hidden barb: it relegated conservatives to a prior stage of the historical process. This added to the personal resentment some conservatives felt against Geering when he used variations of the 'educational' argument against them.

Thus the tensions within the radical group helped to contribute something to an expansion of the controversy, but also helped to stabilize it at a high level of bitterness.

III. FORCES WORKING AGAINST EXPANSION OF THE CONTROVERSY

During 1967, the controversy was in a stage of expansion and in November reached its peak. Nevertheless, there were contrary forces working to reduce its intensity and routinize it within the formal procedures of the church. While this diminution can be partly accounted for by the organizational difficulties and dilemmas facing the groups, it was also due to the conflicting role of powerful personalities.

(1) Moratorium was placed on public debate

In April, the Moderator, S.C. Read, asked the participants to restrict any statements on the matters in dispute to the confines of the church. Speeches were to be closed to the press,[84] television debates were to be avoided, and articles in church newspapers were to be prefixed with a warning that they were not to be reprinted without the moderator's permission. The moderator himself was to police the policy and decide which articles were suitable for publication. This request was framed to permit full theological discussion to continue without the 'inflammatory distortions'[85] of the mass media. Moreover, since many of the matters in debate were to be placed before the Assembly as formal charges, they were declared sub judice by the moderator inasfar as they imputed doctrinal error to Geering. This meant that discussion could continue with two restrictions: that it was confined to the church; and that it avoided personalities. This decision was conveyed by letter to each presbytery, although the press reported that only public discussion was restricted.[86]

84 Although some APL supporters managed to smuggle a tape-recorder into a private meeting at Canterbury University at which Geering spoke. They produced a full transcript of this address at Assembly.

85 E.g. Geering claims (A Trial, p.72) that the Dominion description of his sermon at Victoria University was 'a piece of distorted reporting'. The APL, on the other hand, accused Geering of using the media to inflame the situation: 'Principal Geering is quite intelligent enough to know just what he was doing when he went into public with his views and statements to the Press. He chose his own battle-ground very deliberately to create what can only be considered a public scandal related to the faith.' Ibid p.27f.

86 E.g. Auckland Star, (April 12 1967), 'Church antagonists undertake to say no more.'

This, however, worked slightly more to the advantage of the conservatives. Although Wardlaw, whose main impact was through press statements and public addresses, was immobilized by the moratorium, Blaikie and Gunn continued to air their views in public. Blaikie had an article published in the EP, entitled 'Professor Geering's Agnosticism',[87] and sent a letter to the Outlook which was banned by Read, but nevertheless printed and lifted out by the secular press. Gunn, through his editorship of the EP, carried on his personal crusade against Geering and attacked the Assembly itself before it had even met.[88] But an unexpected regional variation of the moratorium resulted from intelligent control of information by the Dunedin presbytery Advisory Committee convened by a WF minister, F.R. Belmer. Belmer was responsible for conveying to his presbytery the contents of the letters received, and when Read's letter came asked for debate to be confined to theological issues and kept out of the media, his committee discreetly omitted mention of the fact. This meant that Geering and his colleagues at the Hall were acting on the erroneous press report which suggested that Read had asked for a suspension of all public debate on the matter.[89] Consequently, Dunedin presbytery, the centre of support for Geering, was

87 E.P., XVII (September-October 1967) 266-275. Blaikie claims that 'Professor Geering has now come ... to a position of agnostic unbelief which has hitherto been regarded as involving a rejection of the Christian Faith'. (p.272). Read was criticized for permitting this to be printed, but he argued that as the article was written before charges were laid, it was not subject to any ban.

88 Ibid., p.257f. 'The Assembly, no doubt, will seek a compromise solution. There will be the usual talk of "differing interpretations", "academic freedom", "new theological insights" and the like. But this is no time for soothing words which merely confuse the issue'.

89 Interview, T.E. Pollard.

quieter than it otherwise might have been during 1967.

Thus the moratorium had mixed success. It helped to stabilize the conflict by curtailing the escalatory effect of mass media coverage and curbed the tendency towards personal attacks on opponents.

(2) The effect of individuals

The most influential person during the 1967 crisis was probably Read. This was not just because of his official position as Moderator (and Clerk) but also because of the wide respect he commanded in the church. Even before his moderatorial year people who were dissatisfied with church policies had usually written to him rather than to the moderator of the time. He had won many friends by his impartiality in dealing with such issues and his helpfulness to those who were uncertain of constitutional procedure.[90] He also kept on speaking terms with every theological group and so was well informed of attitudes around the country. This information led him to the conviction that a moratorium on public debate should be called and that the Doctrine Committee should make some doctrinal statements for the guidance of local congregations. Both of these efforts met with success. However despite his seeming omniscience, his omnipotence faltered on occasions. He suggested to the Doctrine Committee, for example, that they examine the charges against Geering point by point, and decide which of his views were outside the 'substance of the faith'. The

90 Wardlaw, in an interview, admitted that Read 'did everything in his power to make sure we got a fair go'. A radical minister agreed, suggesting that 'people believe him more than God, because he's more visible'.

committee politely told him that he was guilty of over-simplification and rejected his request. The fact that many influential radicals were on the committee (Geering, Nichol, Pollard, Bates and Ferguson) might not have been unrelated to this rejection.

Another prominent leader who used his influence to dampen down conflict was J.S. Murray. Murray was a former moderator and had a good knowledge of the Auckland situation. It was he who was responsible for preparing the 'pastoral' motion for Assembly which tried to do justice to the charges of Wardlaw and Blaikie without condemning Geering, and it was he who was chosen as the convenor of a Drafting Committee to compose a 'pastoral letter'.

The Convenor of the Business Committee, W.A. Best, was also respected by both sides. His role, however, was not so much in conciliation, or convincing others to keep quiet, but in safeguarding the rights of each group by ensuring that Assembly procedure was fair to both parties.

Some conservatives were also attempting to introduce a note of moderation to their case. In an EP article, for instance, one WF committee member stressed the need for careful representation of opponents' views, and gave a warning not to take it upon oneself to judge who was a legitimate Christian.[91] Lewis Wilson later acted in a conciliating role at Assembly: in his speech he dissociated himself from any personal criticism of Geering and confined

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91 Mrs W. Lewis, EP, XVII, (January-February 1967) 45-52. 'Will there be a Christian Faith for our Children?' was the title of the article.

himself more to the actual theology in question.[92] His critique was less inflammatory than either Wardlaw's or Blaikie's, for unlike them, he made the assumption that Geering was (a) honest (b) Christian.[93] This did not have the effect of restraining other conservatives, however. Indeed, Wilson found that some of the hostility usually reserved for Geering was now directed against him.

On the local level, too, there were people who used their influence to promote reconciliation or reduce conflict. In Dunedin, for example, R.H. Gardner, who had been to bible class with Read 45 years before, provided more restrained leadership for the APL than the Association had further north.[94] In Christchurch, some of the 'elder statesmen' such as L. Jones and R.M. Rogers kept a moderating hand in the local situation the same way Murray was doing in Auckland.

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92 'I speak on this with some anguish, and I appreciate what my brethren have said about receiving us and I don't make any reflection about Professor Geering's integrity or sincerity or Christian faith or anything like that'. His criticism of Geering was that the approach to the N.T. he was expounding - giving a late dating to the gospels, heavily emphasising oral tradition etc. was not really representative of contemporary scholarship. Assembly tapes 1967.

93 Blaikie claimed that he was not suggesting that Geering was unchristian. (A Trial) p.69. However in implying that his theology was an abandonment 'of the very heart of the Christian Faith' and tying orthodoxy to certain doctrines, he seemed to be suggesting that Geering too was unchristian. From the point of view of conflict expansion it was irrelevant whether his accusations had been deciphered correctly.

94 At the time when Wardlaw was resigning from the church in disgust, and Arnold was accusing it of aposta y, Gardner sent a letter to Otago APL members, which included this assessment of the 'Greyfriars' meeting with Read and Wilson: 'The writer felt that addresses by Mr Read and Mr Wilson were most helpful and certainly 'cleared the air' quite a deal, although it was evident from the questions asked that there was a great deal of concern.'

Others won reputations for themselves as diplomats in the exercise of committee convenorships. The most prominent of these was L.H. Jenkins, under whose leadership the Doctrine Committee produced theological statements meeting with widespread approval. His committee played an important balancing role in the whole controversy. Gilkison received considerable prestige from his successful convenorship of the Overseas Missions Committee as well as from his skill in presbytery diplomacy. Men such as these had a stabilizing influence in the church and had the ability and experience to prevent precipitate action by the Assembly.

So the intensity of the conflict was alleviated somewhat by the moderating influence of church fathers. Some such leaders dissuaded participants in the controversy from making personal attacks on their enemies, while others found themselves made into political scapegoats by their friends. But even when personal attacks were redirected towards those who were trying to foster reconciliation, this did not directly contribute to an expansion of the controversy, for not only did it take some of the pressure off the opponents, but it increased the conviction of moderates that the extremes must be curbed. So while criticism of opponents usually increased the levels of hostility, redirection of such criticism against the moderators only strengthened their determination to moderate.

IV. CONCLUSION OF THE SECOND STAGE

November 1967 saw the abortive attempts of conservatives to get Geering convicted of doctrinal error. Their failure

marked, however, not the end of the conservative movement as some feared, but rather ironically, the end of the radical ascendancy in doctrinal matters. For after the trial radicals lost interest in the doctrinal debate, having succeeded in their goal of getting Geering exonerated. They therefore had no desire to extend or improve their organization, and turned their attention to other matters.

Moderates like Storkey and Breward were concerned about the effect the Assembly decision appeared to have had on conservatives and were rather apprehensive about the possibility of a permanent rift. They felt they had fulfilled their duty to Geering as a person by preventing his condemnation, and were now free to placate the conservatives by offering suitable doctrinal palliatives. They were therefore quite receptive to the types of demand the conservative groups would make during the following year.

Meanwhile, the conservatives were learning from their defeat, and were determined to reverse the decision one way or another. A small minority seceded, forming splinter groups around the North Island.[95] But most stayed within the church and began to learn how to use its procedures to their advantage. Both the APL and the WF would split, but their rumps would provide far more tactically sound policies than the groups had previously adopted.

The situation one in which one side had won and the other side had lost. For one group the matter had been

95 Wardlaw set up a 'Presbyterian Fellowship' which called an Australian fundamentalist, B. Gillard, to be its minister. 'Orthodox Presbyterian' churches sprang up in Manurewa (with G.A. McKenzie as minister), in Whakatane (under J.A. Mitchell) and in Hawkes Bay. However, the Hawkes Bay group could not afford their own minister, and so were given the services of Gillard for one weekend a month.

settled. For the other it could never be resolved until 'the people of the church prove their real faith by rising up in protest to replace those kindly, friendly, comforting unbelievers in many of its pulpits with true ministers of the Gospel'.[96]

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96 R.J. Wardlaw, quoted in the N.Z. Herald, (November 11 1967).

CHAPTER V

The period from the end of 1967 until the beginning of 1971 began with the departure of Wardlaw and concluded with a mild censure for Geering. After the peak of November, 1967, the intensity of the conflict slowly began to diminish and the style of organization to change accordingly. It was therefore a period of contraction in which issues lost their saliency and policies much of their bitterness. But the conservatives persevered in their attempt to turn back the radical tide, and after developing the procedural skills and doctrinal base necessary for this, finally persuaded the 1970 Assembly to dissociate itself from some of Geering's statements.

I. DYNAMICS OF THE CONTROVERSY

With the resignation of the Auckland leadership of the APL, the controversy lost much of its momentum and conservatives reverted to more traditional styles of dissent within the church. The range of issues generated by the controversy began to shrink and the accompanying antagonisms to soften. But while the debate was less dominated by personality clashes, a degree of polarization remained and mistrust engendered by the conflict was transferred into other areas of church life.

(1) The extreme groups decided to exit

Wardlaw, and later the entire Auckland executive of the APL, resigned from the association after the heresy

trial.[1] They passed the leadership to R.D. Arnold and a more moderate Wellington executive who tried to steer a more conciliatory course than their predecessors had done.

But a similar upheaval was taking place in the WF, where a disagreement had developed between moderates like Wilson and extremists like Gunn. The result of the struggle was that Gunn (along with several others) left the Fellowship and his position of influence as EP editor.[2] One of Gunn's most vociferous followers, R.E. Donaldson, had recently resigned from his charge after some questions had been asked about his credentials. Another of Gunn's friends, G.A. McKenzie[3] set up a rival 'Orthodox Presbyterian' church over the road from Gunn's church in Manurewa.

A few radicals were also disillusioned with the decision of Assembly, and withdrew from active participation in church politics. One of these was J.K. Nichol, a Christchurch teacher, who regarded the 'pastoral letter' as 'wishy-washy' and too much of a compromise for his liking. He thought that Geering should have been formerly acquitted, rather than the charges against him merely being declared not proven.[4] There were a few other laymen who felt

2 The official reason given for his relinquishing the editorship was illness, but this was scarcely the only reason, as shown by the refusal of the WF to entrust the journal to a single editor after Gunn's resignation.

1 In Wardlaw's terms, it was not he who left the church (and therefore the APL); it was the church which had departed from its standards, and left him defending orthodox Presbyterian doctrine. This type of attitude, quite common in the sectarian wing of Protestantism, has been eloquently described by G.K. Chesterton: 'He was orthodox. He had no pride in having rebelled against them, they had rebelled against him.... If he stood alone in a howling wilderness he was more than a man, he was a church.' Heretics (London: Dodd Mead, 1923) p.11.

3 McKenzie had been interim-moderator of Gunn's parish during the latter's illness, and the two had worked together closely on many occasions.

4 Interview, J.K. Nichol.

similarly and a handful of ministers.

The exit of these extremists from positions of influence, and the departure of some of them from the church, meant that organizational roles could be filled by more moderate leaders, and decision-making could take place in a less embittered atmosphere.

(2) The issues were not perceived as threatening by the radicals

Before the trial the radicals had seen their role as one of protecting a trusted teacher from the attacks of his enemies. This role was no longer necessary, for Geering's exoneration had upheld freedom of speech in the church. They had therefore achieved their goals and were not worried by conservative attempts to define the substance of the faith more rigorously. After the 1968 Assembly, for instance, at which the conservative requests for doctrinal definition were treated favourably, one radical saw this as in no way restricting his theological freedom: 'The atmosphere has now been created in which theological discussion can continue on a less emotive level'.[5] Another radical saw it as a 'pastoral' gesture designed to placate the conservatives:

> The Assembly has acted in a gracious and pastoral way toward a group of people who were troubled about where the church stands in the affirmation of her faith.[6]

Radicals were therefore quite unperturbed by these moves, and even welcomed them since it was hoped they could restore harmony in the church. Because theological language for

5 T.E. Pollard, Dominion, (November 6 1968).

6 G.R. Ferguson, Loc.cit

them was metaphorical anyway, radicals had no difficulty in accepting any statements of faith the Assembly might agree to.

(3) The controversy was decomposed into its constituent issues[7]

After the trial, the conservatives realized that they could not attack Geering again until they had established some constitutional basis on which to do so. They therefore distinguished between three issues which they felt were at stake: whether the church had any theological line, what line it should have, and whether radicals such as Geering conformed to it.

(a) Did the church have any theological line?

One Auckland conservative, B.F. Harris, thought that the 1967 Assembly had established such a line - Geering's. However the real position was quickly pointed out to him by the clerk of Auckland presbytery, L.R. Miller:

> There is a vast and vital difference between endorsing the theological views of Principal Geering, and granting that there is room in the church for his dedicated radical scholarship. If Professor Harris does not think there is such room, then he should say so. But he, as a scholar, should not join the ranks of those who display a wilful refusal to believe that the Assembly did not endorse Principal Geering's views.[8]

Other conservatives disagreed with Harris, claiming that there were no constitutional limitations on belief at all. As one

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7 See J.M. Orbell and G. Fougere, 'Intra-party Conflict and the Decay of Ideology', Journal of Politics, XXXV, (1973) 439-458, who see 'decomposition' as a strategy enabling a party to maximize its appeal.

8 N.Z. Herald, (November 16 1967).

of the more moderate WF members saw the situation, 'after this test case it seems that it doesn't really matter what you believe, or how you express it.[9] This opinion was more accurate, in that there was a wide range of theological views which were considered 'valid'. So the answer to the conservatives' first question was in the negative: there was no single line approved by Assembly. Rather, there were several points of view which it was permissible to hold in the church.

(b) What line should the church have?

There was some division between conservatives over this issue. Some, like Gunn, took a firm line, basing their claims on the Westminster Confession. Others, like Arnold and Blaikie, were more flexible and wanted an affirmation of only what they considered the substance of the faith. But they all agreed that some line was necessary to prevent doctrinal anarchy. One formulation which met with the approval of all but the extremists was a 'statement of fundamental doctrines', added as Appendix III to the Doctrine Committee's 1968 report. Two years later this achieved regulative status, thereby 'negating the unfortunate Pastoral Letter.'[10]

At the same time, the Doctrine Committee was exploring the question logically prior to the question of <u>which</u> standards the church subscribed to: what did it mean to <u>subscribe</u> to a statement of faith anyway? The committee suggested that 'where any office-bearer affirms a Statement

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9 D.F. Sage, <u>E.P.</u>, XVIII (January-February 1968) p.7. This statement was expressed more forcefully by Kerr, the Australian fundamentalist in N.Z. to encourage secession: '(The Church) has exonerated Professor Geering, proclaiming itself finally to be a church without a bible, an institution without standards, a society that believes everything and therefore nothing.' <u>Christian Beacon</u>, (December 28 1967) p.1.

10 <u>Report of the APL National Conference</u>, December 1968, p.8.

or Confession of Faith he is bound by the faith expressed in the Statement or Confession rather than by the precise words themselves.' (Emphasis added)[11] This was something of an escape clause for radicals, but it did not meet with serious criticism.

However, this line was still too broad for some of the more extreme ministers still in the church. One such person eventually resigned from the church, telling his congregation, 'it has ... become my conviction that our standards still fall far short of our doctrinal standards and at the best they are paper tigers having no authority or disciplinary status.'[12]

(c) Did radicals such as Geering conform to this standard? This was one question on which they had no doubt. Arnold expressed it clearly on behalf of most conservatives:

> One thing I believe is abundantly clear; these two sets of teachings cannot both be correct; they cannot be reconciled by taking a middle position between them (any more than you can go to North and South at the same time); and they cannot exist together peaceably in the one church, for each is death to the other.[13]

But it was not until 1970 that this question was raised officially again, when Geering made some rather unconventional remarks on Brisbane television. The transcript of this interview was quickly obtained by the APL and South Auckland conservatives, and they asked the Assembly to dissociate itself from statements made in it. This request was granted,

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11 Blue Book, 1968, 132a.

12 W. Davies, Outlook, (October 10 1970) p.23.

13 R.D. Arnold, typewritten mss., speech given on North Island tour, May 1968 p.3.

despite belated opposition from some of the radicals. But the way the issues had been decomposed prevented any real bitterness and helped to reduce the intensity of the conflict.

(4) The issues were less personal

Because the conservatives realized the futility of attacking Geering again until some constitutional change had been effected, they avoided making any personal attacks. For it was the church which was responsible for the fluid doctrinal situation, not Geering personally. Wardlaw expressed this in one of his final public statements as chairman of the APL:

> The responsibility for today's agnosticism now rests exactly where it should - not on the shoulders of a single theologian, but on the whole church through its ruling section.[14]

So Geering could not be touched until the church had clarified its own position.[15]

Moreover, the APL learned from their 1967 failure that personal attacks were counterproductive: all they had succeeded in doing was to make a martyr out of Geering. This mistake they were determined to avoid in the future, and Arnold expressly disclaimed any personal attacks in a speech he gave to the 1968 Assembly:

> May I make it clear before I proceed that I am not wishing to raise the question of the standing of any person in the church, but rather to illustrate the doctrinal position of the church as a result of last Assembly's ruling on certain teachings.[16]

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14 Southland News, (November 29 1967) p.15.

15 General solutions to this problem were suggested, ranging from a request for a mass exodus of all the 'Doubting Thomases' to a proposal that ministers be chained to their bibles. ('Once the Bible was chained to the pulpit, and it would be a good thing if the majority of our ministers were chained to their Bibles.') See the Outlook's of March 2 1968 p.25 and July 18 1970 p.13.

16 Typewritten mss., p.2.

Nor were there any personal attacks from any of the radicals, partly because there were no conservative personalities standing out as particularly objectionable; and partly because they were no longer interested in continuing the controversy.

(5) The issues were less numerous

The APL tried to establish its theological position in 'the broad central stream of Christian orthodoxy'.[17] Consequently, they were careful to avoid peripheral issues which appealed only to the narrower conservatives in their ranks. Because they wanted their policies to have wide appeal they tried not to take stands which might restrict it. The effect of this policy was to reduce the number of issues the APL paid attention to. But this was not just a ploy, for there was genuine divergence in the APL ranks. Arnold, for instance, spoke on one occasion in favour of homosexual law reform.[18]

The association also tried to avoid any anti-clerical undertones in its publications claiming to 'seek the understanding and co-operation of our ministers, and acknowledge with gratitude the help many of them have given to our Association.'[19] Its petition to the 1968 Assembly was sent under the signature of three ministers, so it was a serious change of policy.[20]

17 P.L., (April 1968), occasional broadsheet p.1.

18 In Assembly debate on the subject. Interview, R.D. Arnold.

19 P.L., p1.

20 The APL of course claimed that it was never anti-clerical, but nevertheless many ministers believed it was and acted accordingly. So the effect on the controversy was the same whatever their intentions had been.

It also kept clear of the anti-intellectualism of its early days, and now went as far as to assert the scholastic merits of its own position. Occasionally they even tried to challenge the integrity of Geering's scholarship:

> It is unfortunate that I shall have to give further publicity to a man who has already been over-publicized, I do not consider that the quality of Principal Geering's scholarship merits the heavy price the Presbyterian Church is paying for it, or the amount of attention it is receiving ... What Principal Geering offers us is often careless and inaccurate, often irresponsible; and ... what is distinctive about it is not its scholarship, but the way in which its basically anti-Christian presuppositions time and again vitiate its scholarship.[21]

However, this came perilously close to a personal attack on Geering, so this argument was widely jettisoned in later speeches and publications. Thus one issue which could have been added to the APL arsenal was avoided.

(6) Inertia set in

After two years of doctrinal controversy many people in the church began to tire of it, and much of the energy which had fed the fires of controversy until the trial had largely spent itself. For instance, in the February 1968 meeting of Auckland presbytery, a question relating to the controversy was met with groans and a refusal to discuss the matter. Many ministers just wanted to be left in peace to restore any pastoral damage done in their parishes by the controversy. Any attempts to put pressure on the church in one way or another were usually counterproductive, as one APL

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21 R.D. Arnold, Typewritten mss, speech given in Nelson, (December 17 1967), p.2.

member found to his cost.[22]

This coincided with a slackening of the media interest in the church's domestic difficulties. The type of policies which the APL were following were cautious and not particularly newsworthy. Geering tried to avoid exposure on television, and so all the attractive personalities had either left the church or were unavailable. The consequent lack of media interest caused some comment in APL circles, especially after what they had considered a minor victory in 1968:

> The fact that Assembly moved unanimously in this direction was to me remarkable, well-nigh momentous thing, yet it made only a small column in the N.Z. Herald on the following morning. Here after three years of heated debate, controversy and upset in the Church, the Church was making a firm statement of its beliefs. This is what our members had been waiting for, yet the significance of it seemed to escape the secular press.[23]

It was only with the disassociation moves in 1970 that public interest returned, but even then it was far less dramatic to suggest that someone's unguarded comments were not official church policy than to charge him with heresy. Moreover, Geering had never claimed that his opinions had official sanction.

(7) The conflict was transferred to other areas

Much of the bitterness that had characterized the controversy at its height still simmered away under the

22 When I.M. Moses threatened to withhold his budget contributions because he disapproved of the 1967 doctrinal decisions of Assembly, his threat backfired. One highly respected missionary wrote back to the Outlook, 'For Mr Moses the budget seems to be some sort of weapon. For me and my family the budget is bread and butter and rice ... I would like Mr Moses to write to me personally explaining why he thinks my work is not worth supporting, and I and my family are not worth keeping alive.' Outlook, (May 25 1968) p.2. See (March 16 1968), p.25, for Moses' original letter.

23 Report to APL National Conference, by E. Campbell, (December 1968) p.5.

surface, and although the APL and other conservative groups managed to follow a more moderate line on doctrine, the hostility found other outlets.

The Christian Education department, described by one conservative informant as 'a bunch of misfits', took part of this criticism. Many of those on the departments staff were unashamedly radical[24] and did nothing to conceal their distaste for conservative opinions. R.H. Hamlin, who became director on the resignation of D. White, was reputed as having 'not one evangelical bone left in his body'. He was roundly criticized when he later testified in favour of HAIR at the public trial of the stage show. E.B. Stewart, the Director of Youth Ministry, was also a radical who was highly articulate. He was responsible for compiling a kit on 'secular' marriage services, which were another radical innovation conservatives opposed bitterly.

Stewart was also an able writer, and he played a major role in producing the publication Moment, an interdenominational youth magazine. This was regularly reviled by conservatives, who were not altogether happy with its theological leanings:

> It would be appreciated if you would cancel my subscription to Moment immediately. I am thoroughly disgusted with this publication, which could not be called Christian even with the help of the wildest imagination.
>
> The latest issues I received made me realize that - with a magazine of this low standard on its side - Christianity's enemies need do nothing. I am all in favour of attracting the attention of the younger generation - but not at the cost of degrading our faith to a standard lower than the gutter.[25]

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24 Although some of the opposition to the CE Department was transferred, this was accentuated by internal disagreements and bad public relations.

25 Moment, VI (December 1972), p.5.

But the main arena into which conservative disaffections were channeled was church union, in which a referendum was held in mid-1971. Arnold was not an ardent anti-union advocate, nor did the APL provide any real outlet for anti-union sentiments. Instead, an 'Association of Continuing Presbyterians' was set up to fight union and distribute literature encouraging people to vote 'No' in the referendum. So, of those who had their first taste of church politics with the APL, some now joined the ACP.

(8) Social polarization reduced friction

As a result of the controversy, people were more aware of their theological position and tended to associated more with their allies. Minority groups often formed themselves into theological ghettoes, rather than hold their opinions in the antagonistic climate of a larger unit. Some of the more conservative churches in 'liberal' areas cut themselves off from other Presbyterian churches in their presbytery, supporting their own missionaries and sometimes withholding 'budget' funds. Those churches also tended to draw others of a similar theological persuasion into their congregations, thereby reducing the tension within congregations.[26] This growing insularity of minority groups meant that there was very little contact between those with different views. This could of course lead to mutual reinforcement of prejudice. But, on the other hand, when issues were less salient, the social polarization encouraged churchmen at the local level

26 A letter sent out by the APL accepted such withdrawal where other avenues of change were closed: 'Some of you may feel that your loyalty to Christ is compromised if Sunday by Sunday, you are present while destructive teaching is preached ... If an impasse is reached, some may find a solution in moving to a more congenial congregation, for the sake of peace and a good conscience'. (February 7 1968) p.2.

to forget the rift that still separated the groups.[27]

(9) The major participants tended to be moderates

Despite the continuance of the APL, those who held the centre of the stage were largely moderates. When general questions of theology were raised, it was to men such as I. Breward that the church turned for answers. Breward wrote a book on 'Authority and Freedom', suggesting that the two were not incompatible, and gave his opinion that while the church should not take refuge in statements of faith, they were, on occasions, necessary.[28]

The Doctrine Committee was also in the centre of the debate with its statements and reports. When the APL petition came before the 1968 Assembly, it was not this so much as the Doctrine Committee report and the sessional committee proposals which became church policy.

In 1970, the Assembly decision to disassociate from Geering was not because of the oratory of WF ministers or APL laymen, but largely because of the intervention of two well-known moderates, Storkey and R.T. Feist,[29] who spoke in favour of the move.

Thus there was a general diminution in the intensity of the conflict after 1967 which was marked by a decrease in interest, participation and antagonism of the extremes.

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27 M. Sherif argues that intergroup contact during a conflict only reinforces the prejudices existing between groups for participants tend to ignore any favourable information about their adversaries. 'Superordinate Goals in the Reduction of Intergroup Conflict', American Journal of Sociology, LXIII (1958) p.349-358. So polarizations reduced this tension, and made it possible for local church members to continue in the Presbyterian church.

28 Authority and Freedom, (Christchurch: Presbyterian Bookroom, 1969), See also artides in the Outlook, September 14,28, October 12, 1968.

29 Feist was convenor of the church's Public Questions Committee.

ORGANIZATION OF THE CONTROVERSY

The organization of the groups underwent considerable changes after the trial and the departure of the extremists. The APL refined both its strategy and its tactics, while radicals lost their unifying link and offered very little concerted opposition to the rejuvenated association.

(1) The conservative groups

There was much greater cooperation between the main conservative groups after 1967, partly because they began to realize the value of concerted action, and partly because their policies had moved closer together.

(a) Goals

The common goal of both the APL and the WF was to reestablish 'orthodox' doctrine in the church. Geering was still taken as a negative referent, but they realized the unwisdom of making further personal attacks on him. Moreover, they realized the futility of such a course, for the Assembly had ruled that Geering 'had not stepped out of the bounds of reasonable liberty of thought or expression or doctrine'.[30] (Emphasis added). It was therefore necessary to establish some doctrinal standards which the church was prepared to use. This was the aim of Blaikie as much as that of Arnold, so the general approach of the laymen was similar to that of the conservative ministers.

(b) Strategy and tactics

The strategy the conservatives were following was far more realistic than previously. It involved capturing the 'middle ground' of the Assembly, rather than hoping to use

30 Pastoral Letter, A Trial, p.111.

the outside threat of lay dissatisfaction and mass disruption. The strategy involved influencing decision-makers at the national level.

It was in the area of tactics that the conservative organization had faltered before. They had failed to realize the importance of developing tactics compatible with their strategy, and working out in detail the techniques which would have most chance of success. From 1968 to 1970 these deficiencies were largely remedied by careful organization.

(i) The APL

The APL had a dual set of tactics: one set for their own members and one set for the larger constituency to which they were appealing. They realized the necessity for holding their membership by preventing widespread secession, for the rules of the APL stated that only those who remained in the church could be members of the association. They realized also the need to appear moderate if they were to have any impact on the national scene. So a double set of tactics was developed.

Internal tactics

To appease the membership, Arnold took a tough line. He had to convince them to stay inside the church without in any way approving of the Assembly's decision to tolerate radical theology. So he echoed the cry of the secessionists that the church was betraying its standards. 'I believe', he declared, 'that we as a church are flirting with apostasy

and compromising our loyalties to the Lord'.[31] He went on, however, to claim that the APL provided a sanctuary in which one could remain in a compromised church without betraying one's beliefs. 'We believe', he stressed, that 'we have the support of thousands of Presbyterians who feel that they can only stay within the church if they can express their dissent from its compromised position through a protest movement such as ours'.[32] But this did not mean that he could admit to trusting the procedures of the church, which had so recently exonerated a blatant unbeliever.[33] For the procedures had proved unjust: the partiality of the church court was clear, and should have been declared openly.[34] The church 'would have done better to have admitted that she did not intend to maintain equal justice ... than to carry through the kind of trial that she did'.[35]

He spared no mercy for Geering personally whom he denounced as 'often irresponsible' as well as 'unchristian', an advocate of 'pernicious doctrinal error', and one whose theological vandalism had left behind 'the rubble of unbelief'.[36]

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31 R.D. Arnold, op.cit, p.2. Cf. Statement of National Conference of APL after meeting in Wellington, (January 20 1968), 1f. in which the Presbyterian church is seen as a 'church with compromised loyalty to her Lord'.

32 Arnold, op.cit.

33 'For the present we will put no further confidence in working through the machinery of the courts of the church. We will, instead, make our appeal directly to the consciences of individual members'. Loc.cit.

34 'I have no doubt in my mind that the trial was not conducted by Assembly in a manner which could have given true justice. It is freely admitted that it was not conducted by the standards laid down in the Book of Order ... The proceedings in my opinion departed from the requirements of common justice.' Ibid, p.5.

35 Ibid, p.4.

36 Ibid, p.2f.

Those who had tried to reconcile the two parties fared little better however:

> Our Church's present compromised position is leading fine men to act beneath their better selves. It is pathetic to watch their pitiful endeavours to put a politic coat of whitewash on the Church's mistaken decisions. I admire their loyalty, but deplore its prostituation to such ends.[37]

The association also declared that it would not accept the decision of the court to dismiss the charges against Geering. They used an inversion of the 'decision by Holy Spirit' argument, only with less specificity as to which person of the Trinity was being invoked: 'This case may be declared closed in the courts of the church. Of this I am convinced: God has not closed it.'[38]

This was a very effective policy in retaining the support of the members who were contemplating resignation from the association. Even the Presbyterian Fellowship was mild by comparison.

External tactics

However, the constituency they were appealing to was quite different from the membership; holding the organization together was only the first step.[39] Their tactics for wooing the larger audience were in complete contrast to those they had used to retain the support of the conservative laymen, and involved careful diplomatic activity within the accepted procedures and without their accustomed excesses.

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37 Ibid, p.4.

38 Loc.cit. Cf. Henderson, op.cit., p.31: 'Quite the best way of getting what you want is to persuade other people that it is what God wants.'

39 However this more moderate policy was accepted by only two votes at the May executive meeting, and it would probably have been lost had not bad weather prevented the flights of two of the members.

They stressed their willingness to work through the courts of the church, putting forward a mild petition which was carefully worded to avoid antagonizing anybody.[40] They vehemently disavowed any semblance of personal attack, and were careful not to mention Geering by name. They showed respect for church officials and were 'profoundly grateful' for Assembly decisions.[41] They lobbyed effectively, getting moderate conservatives like H.O. Bowman and W.T. Woods to identify themselves openly with association policies.[42] Another tactic they used to diffuse the radical's superiority in procedural skills was to exaggerate their own powerlessness, trying apparently to induce guilt in their opponents for having so ruthlessly cut down humble laymen.[43] This was aided by frequent threats of secession, something which would be regretted by radicals who wanted to prove that different theologies could be contained within the church. This tactic succeeded, in that it made the whole church conscious of the need to placate conservatives. But this

40 This contrasted with a petition drawn up by Gunn. The APL commented on this in a newsletter: 'The Rev. Gunn's petition is designed, he has explained, to bring about a "confrontation" at next Assembly. We feel that such an "all or nothing" approach is not the most wise, and would not gain wide support.' cyclostyled letter, (May 28 1968).

41 Dominion, (November 6 1968).

42 These two, along with Sage, signed the covering letter to the APL petition.

43 See, for example, J.M. Carlsmith and A.E. Gross, 'Some effects of Guilt on Compliance.' in Freedman et al. (1971) 522-563: '(Experiments undertaken) provide convincing evidence that a very powerful technique for obtaining compliance is to first induce a person to do something which harms another person ... guilt about the action is the mediating factor in producing this compliance.' p.563.

conciliation could be taken too far, some radicals feared: as one Christchurch minister told the writer, 'we bend over backwards to hold the conservatives, but let radicals walk out in droves'.

Another successful tactic for winning some aura of respectability was to get highly respected members of the church to speak at their meetings. These included Norman Perry (a former lay moderator) and Breward. But even when speaking at Assembly APL members tried to refrain from mentioning the association at all, lest they incur some of the wrath it had earned the previous year.[44]

(ii) The WF

The WF had to similarly criticize the Assembly decision without advocating disruption. But they made no real attempt to develop a different argument for internal consumption than they did for the larger constituency. So although they criticized the Assembly decision, they left the option open that it did not really mean what it said. 'The fellowship repudiates the apparent departure from long-established doctrinal standards as evidenced by the decisions of the recent General Assembly.'[45] (Emphasis added). But the fellowship refused to excuse itself from responsibility as the APL has done: 'We should resist any tendency to stand over against the Church and criticise it as though we are distinct from it. As part of the Church we are all involved in its inherent imperfections and in its present sickness;

44 Interview, E. Campbell.

45 Cyclostyled letter from WF executive, signed by J.N. Smith and G.I. Thompson, (December 12 1967).

and consequently, share in some measure, responsibility for the state of things out of which Assembly decisions issue'.[46] But they too learned many of the skills they had previously neglected. One Southland informant said that they sometimes learned the last two lines of a colleague's speech in order to be first with amendments.

Because they did not develop internal tactics, they were unable to retain the support of their extremists. Gunn and several of his followers left the fellowship to protest against its mild stand.[47] One conservative associate of Gunn's claimed that 'one year ago the WF of NZ was known as a vigorous evangelical witness. Today it is a spent force and a laughing stock to the world'.[48] This type of attack did something to give the WF stand some respectability.

(2) The change in conservative strategy, 1970

In 1970, the WF and the APL felt strong enough to reintroduce the question of Geering's orthodoxy, but continued to use the same moderate tactics they had developed after 1967. They asked only that the Assembly 'dissociate' itself from some statements Geering had made in a television interview. The groundwork for this had already been laid when 'Appendix III' had become regulative in 1969, and so there were now some doctrines that the church had unreservedly assented to.

46 Loc.cit.

47 This is perhaps too charitable an explanation. He attempted to get the WF to merge with the APL; he accused Bates of trying to make it impossible for a continuing church to get property, he predicted 'a strong attempt in 1968 to eradicate evangelical minorities'. When the WF rejected his ideas, he left.

48 G. Kerr, op.cit., p.2.

When Geering appeared to deny some of these, it was a simple matter to contrast his statements with those of the previous Assembly, and ask the Assembly to reaffirm that his statements were not the official position of the church on these points.

This was an intelligent strategy for the conservatives to adopt, for it had widespread appeal. It could play on the theological exhaustion of many in the church who were tired of discussing doctrine, even if they did not particularly disagree with Geering. It could appeal to those who wanted full theological discussion to continue, but preferred to keep the mass media out of it. It could attract those who were prepared to give Geering's ideas legitimacy, but not the stamp of official approval.[49]

So the same group of uncommitted neutrals who had been prepared to vote for freedom of speech and defend Geering against personal attack in 1967, were equally prepared to disassociate themselves from his statements and to remind him of the responsibilities of freedom in 1970.

Thus through moderation and compromise the conservatives had managed to capture the middle ground, and win what one APL member described as 'an overwhelming victory for the truth'.

(3) The radical response

During the years after the trial the radicals had very little in common to hold them together. Some of Geering's friends felt they had a responsibility to protect him, and

49 It was the method recommended by an American Episcopal Commission to deal with doctrinal error. See (ed) S.F. Bayne, (1967)pp.28f.

so they opposed any move which could be constructed as being critical of him. Others wanted to make a 'pastoral' geature to conservatives.[50] Yet others were genuinely in sympathy with the desire of conservatives for some clear doctrinal guidelines.[51] So there was very little concerted action at Assembly level to oppose the APL, although disassociation moves were soundly defeated in both Dunedin and Wellington presbyteries.

One of the reasons behind this radical disorganization in 1970 was the belief that while they had succeeded in defending Geering's right to speak, they were not committed to approving everything he said, especially in the heat of a television interview. Moreover, what they were being asked to do in 1970 was in effect rather similar to what they had asked Assembly to do in 1967. In 1967 the Assembly ruled that what Geering said was permissible (though not necessarily official) while in 1970 it ruled that it was not official (though not necessarily impermissible).

They had become rather complacent after 1967, and tended to assume that they could command a working majority in Assembly. However, they seemed to forget that they, like the conservatives were only a minority in the Assembly.

Unless they succeeded in capturing the middle ground, the uncommitted neutrals, their procedural skills would be in vain. And so, in 1970, they were finally out-manouevered by their conservative adversaries.

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50 G.R. Ferguson was renowned for this phrase, but others shared his opinion. E.g. 'It is a way of going along with those who found it hard to take', was how one moderator described the disassociation, in reference to previous doctrinal decisions.

51 E.g. L.R. Miller, letter to N.Z. Herald, (November 15 1967): 'I am sure that the most liberal in the Church would agree that the present doctrinal position in Presbyterianism is unsatisfactory.'

(4) How did the organization affect the development of the controversy

Just as the organization provided a spur to escalation during the first period of expansion, so it provided a check to growth during the final stage of contraction.

(a) The moderate policies of the APL (at least for external consumption) meant that they were no longer a source of irritation to many in the church. The association could now be considered more properly "not a lot of loose-footed fly-by-nights and malcontents, but... of the bone and sinew of the Church".[52] They had become almost respectable.

(b) The division between internal and external tactics meant that the association could be conciliatory without losing the support of their membership. It also meant that their external policies could be more moderate and the bitterness of these policies considerably reduced. This consequently brought less reaction from their opponents.

(c) The policies of the APL and WF were not directed against any particular member of the radical group, at least not in a personal way. This reduced the level of participation from those who had rallied around Geering the previous year to defend him from personal attack.

(d) Because conservative strategy was more cautious, and concentrated mainly on constitutional change, it attracted very little publicity from the media. This helped to reduce the level of interest in the issues and

52 R.D. Arnold, typewritten mss., speech given in Wellington, October 26 1966.

consequently their saliency.

(e) The new stand of the APL tended to draw support from a wide range of church opinion, even from those who wanted to make 'pastoral' gestures to conservatives. So the cleavages had become cross-cutting, and the level of polarization was reduced.

(f) The fact that radicals did not really involve themselves at all, let alone organize their efforts, meant that there was considerably less friction between the groups. Consequently, the antagonisms began to diminish.

III. FORCES WORKING AGAINST EXPANSION

While most of the patterns of controversy and organizational trends were working for contraction of the conflict, some mention should also be made of the other efforts which were made to reduce tension and diminish the intensity of the controversy.

(1) Co-optation

This was a practice the church had often used to defuse conflict and absorb dissidents. It also invigorated some of the church committees to have different perspectives available to them in their deliberations. Arnold found himself on the Doctrine Committee, while Campbell not only joined an Assembly committee, but became convenor of an important presbytery committee as well. The effect of this co-optation was apparently to show some conservatives that their own opinions were quite similar to those of many others

on the committee concerned.[53] It may have also encouraged some radicals to revise the stereotypes they had held about conservatives.

However, there were risks in co-optation. It might lead to defection, by exposing people to the risk of realizing that they had many points in common with their opponents, and could therefore not in honesty carry on as if they were still implacable foes. The way to escape this possibility was to develop a two-tier system of response, as Arnold did very successfully.

But a more serious risk was that of a loss of credibility in any one associated with compromise. This was all the more critical if such a person had been a moderating influence on his colleagues. This happened to some extent with Wilson and Gosling after their involvement on the 1967 drafting committee, when they became less influential with more extreme conservatives than they had been earlier. However, this did not have much impact on the course of the controversy, for the extremist group left the church shortly afterwards.

(2) Appointments[54]

During the third stage of the controversy, moderates tried to act in a reconciliatory way. One of the ways they tried to make conservatives feel they still had a role in the church was to make suitable appointments to vacant positions. One such position was a newly-created chair of

53 This was suggested by W.A. Best and T.E. Pollard, in interviews. It was not always successful however. See above p.53.

54 This could be seen as the conflict-restoring tactic of 'widening the agenda', which is described by Boulding in 'Organization and Conflict', Journal of Conflict Resolution, I (1957), 122-134.

pastoral theology, where there were two major contenders. The first was G.H. Robinson, who was considered to have the best academic qualifications for the post, and who had been lecturing in Christian education at the Theological Hall. He was considered fairly radical during the controversy.[55] The second was C.I.L. Dixon, who had won himself a reputation as a successful parish minister, but was less academically qualified than Robinson. He had come out openly against Geering in Forum, accusing him of 'general muddlement' in his thinking, and making remarks about prayer 'of the nature that any pagan rationalist could think up'.[56]

While the position called for a person with practical rather than just academic qualifications, this was not the only reason Dixon received the appointment. There was some reaction against academics in general which was influencing the mood of the church. But more pertinent was the desire to see a 'more balanced' theological faculty at Knox. One of those most closely involved with Dixon's nomination admitted that such political considerations played an important part in the committee decision. This nomination met with Assembly approval, and Dixon became professor of pastoral theology.

The second appointment was to the editorship of the Outlook, which had become vacant with the death of its previous editor. C.L. Gosling, who had been the first editor of the EP was the successful applicant for the

55 See Outlook, April 15 1967, p.14, where he wrote a letter to the editor, expressing the view that there was no harm in very open theological discussions.

56 Forum, XXI (July 1968), p.7.

position. A couple of years earlier the fact that he was a leading member of the WF would have prejudiced many churchmen against him. But at a time when it was considered important to pacify conservatives, he won general approval. Any misgivings about his partiality were soon dispelled, for he was very careful to give a balanced coverage of doctrinal issues in the magazine.

Many of those who had played a leading role in conciliation were rewarded in one way or another. L.H. Jenkins, who as convenor of the Doctrine Committee had been highly regarded, became moderator-designate in 1970. G.F. McKenzie, who had been convenor of the 1968 sessional committee, followed two years later. N.F. Gilkison became convenor of the important Council of the General Assembly in 1973, and W.A. Best became Executive Secretary of the Church the following year. None of these appointments were directly related to roles these men had played during the controversy, but the skills they displayed in conciliation were not overlooked as important positions became vacant in the church.

CONCLUSION OF THE THIRD STAGE

The final stage of the controversy saw a dimunition in the intensity of the conflict and a gradual decline in the interest from that it had once stimulated. By the middle of 1971 even the personalities in the centre of the stage had changed considerably from the early months of 1966. Wardlaw had long since resigned from the church, while Geering had just taken up a new chair at Victoria University. The APL had gone into abeyance, and Gunn had lost most of the influence he had once exerted. The WF was more moderate,

though still rather weak, and a new conservative organization, the Association of Continuing Presbyterians was beginning to take over the leadership of the conservative movement, as the attention of the church focused once more on church union. APL leaders, such as Arnold and Campbell, who had earlier shocked the church with their extreme views, had now been co-opted into an establishment they had once attacked.

So the issues had finally faded. The controversy had played itself out until both parties were reasonably satisfied with its outcome. Neither side could be said to have really 'won', in the sense of defeating their opponents consistently. And yet both sides achieved their policy goals: the radicals succeeded in defending Geering against his attackers and preserving their right of free speech, and the conservatives succeeded in getting certain doctrines defined as fundamental and accepted as regulative. But, more importantly, both groups had found a role for themselves within the church. The organization had managed to absorb its dissidents without any disastrous schism.

This did not mean that there would no longer be tensions and the conflicts within the church. On the contrary, these would continue to characterize the denomination. However, the church had succeeded in routinizing conflict, in learning to live with tension, and finding a role for its minorities.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The Geering controversy has now been investigated in terms of the dynamics of its development and the organization of its participants. But a case study may also stimulate questions and suggest conclusions beyond the confines of the particular events it seeks to describe. What then can this case study indicate about similar controversies, or to be more precise, about the role of ideology in such controversies?

Coleman, it was suggested, derives his framework from an analysis of community controversies in which ideology did not play a central part. Certainly 'value' issues had an effect on these controversies, but the values were not systematically related; nor were they usually precipitating factors. Their role was rather to accentuate divisions which already existed. A dispute over fluoridation, for example, would be based on a technical question: the proper chemical composition of a town's water supply. It would probably involve such values as individualism, antiscientism and distrust of authority. But these values would not be coordinated into an ideology, and would not be organically related to the specific issue of fluoridation.

However in this study the precipitating issue was clearly an ideological one, the 'resurrection' of Jesus Christ, and the whole debate took place within the contours of an ideology. Nevertheless other issues became involved. There were personality clashes between Geering and Wardlaw,

between Bates and Gunn, between Read and Pollard, and between scores of other participants. There were also 'power' issues at stake: whether the church was under the 'despotic' control of a 'hierarchy biased towards unbelief', or whether the ordinary laymen had some real influence on church policy. There were economic issues introduced as well: whether prolonged controversy would seriously deplete the treasury, and why members should contribute to a budget at all if they disagreed with one of its items.

Since there were both ideological issues and more practical questions involved, it is interesting to ask what was the relative impact of each one on the development of the controversy. Was ideology merely a 'smokescreen' concealing a power struggle, or was it an important constraint on action? Did participants rationalize selfish behaviour with high-flown ideological excuses, or did they really act on principle? This is by no means easy to answer, for it was the ideology which informed its adherents what sort of things were valuable in the first place. To take a simple example, a person who became 'reborn' would be both following self-interest (ensuring his own salvation) and also following the dictates of his ideology. Here self-interest and ideological purity would coincide. But it might be countered that this was not always the case, for during 1966 and 1967 the APL followed a policy which ran directly contrary to their best interests: they alienated most of their potential supporters by using tactics which displayed more ideological conviction than political sense. There is certainly some truth in this from an outsider's perspective. Nevertheless what 'winning' itself involved

was prescribed by the ideology. It did not involve 'doing deals' with unbelievers, and thereby jeopardizing their own immortal souls. In their own terms they were acting quite rationally in refusing to engage in political infighting. So because it is ideology which allocates values, it would be very difficult to disentangle actions 'on principle' from actions motivated by self-interest.[1]

However the role of ideology can be assessed by using Coleman's model as a basis of comparison. With such a baseline one can estimate the extent to which the Geering controversy deviated from 'normal' controversies, and subsequently decide if this deviation can be accounted for by the concept of ideology. So, if ideology had had some impact on the course of the controversy, what perceptible differences might be expected?

(1) Because an ideology will tend to be comprehensive, an ideological controversy should involve a greater range and generality of issues than an 'ordinary' controversy; and because it also tends to be coherent, the issues arising should be systematically related.

Coleman suggests this when he claims that 'political controversies' are less likely to exhibit a shift from the specific to the general than 'disputes based primarily on differing values or economic interests'.[2] To continue his argument it could be said that when the differing values are

1 This is recognized by G. Drake in an essay on 'The Ideology of Oliver Cromwell', Church History, XXXV (1966) 259-272. He suggests that Cromwell's success depended on his being able to distinguish 'God's will' from his own. See also R. Currie, 'Power and Principle: The Anglican Prayer Book Controversy, 1927-1930', Church History, XXXIII (1964) 192-205.

2 Coleman, op.cit., p.10.

systematically related, the number and generality of the issues would be increased still further. This hypothesis is best tested by comparing the range of issues involved in different controversies. An election struggle in Athens, Tennessee involved, according to Coleman, only one major issue:

> the control of the community[3]

This was a non-ideological conflict in which former G.I.s were attempting to oust a party machine which had been running the city for some time.

One type of issue which did involve values was that of fluoridation. A controversy originating with such an issue would typically involve the following issues:

> the best methods of preventing dental decay
> the costs and dangers involved in fluoridation
> whether experts are given too much influence
> possible infringements of individual liberty
> extent of administration's mandate
> the control of the community

The issues here are certainly more general than in the Athens controversy. But they lack any ideological unity or coherence. This contrasts with the issues raised during the Geering controversy:

> resurrection of Jesus
> creation of the world
> immortality of the soul
> possibility of miracles
> personal morality
> education of children
> place of experts (intellectuals) in the church
> control of theological education
> participation of the laity in decision-making
> control of the church
> church union
> role of the church
> the place of confessional statements
> the nature of confessional authority
> the importance of the bible
> the substance of the Faith
> nature of beliefs

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3 Loc.cit.

Here the issues are clearly more numerous and general than in the two previous examples; and although their range is diverse, the issues tend to be organically related. If, for example, the 'resurrection' of Jesus was a physical revivication of the body of Jesus, this would constitute for many a definitive proof of the possibility of miracles. If such doctrinal certainty was possible, then this should be reflected in Christian education programmes, where instruction should replace discovery. If these programmes were sufficiently clear in the guidance they gave young people, much of the confusion about moral standards might be averted. Moreover, some would say, proper standards of conduct and doctrine had already been laid down in the bible, and summarized in the confessions. The church therefore ought to remain loyal to its standards, and avoid any church union arrangements which might threaten them.

Some of the issues which arose were of course not wholly ideological. The control of theological education and participation of the laity in church decision-making contained elements of personality conflicts and power motivations. Other issues displayed suggestions of ingrained prejudice, such as a dislike of experts in general which would find expression in a fluoridation debate as much as a 'resurrection' one; it would be present whether the organization was dedicated to the salvation of souls or the preservation of teeth. Nevertheless the general pattern is confirmed: the issues were both more comprehensive and more coherently related than in controversies which were not fundamentally ideological.

(2) It would be expected that personal attacks would be slower to develop than in non-ideological controversies, because of the centrality of beliefs to the dispute.

When a debate centres around questions of ideology, one would expect ideas to be more important than personalities. Was this the case in the Geering controversy?

Examples of non-ideological controversies could be taken from some elections in the U.S. South, in which there were virtually no issues dividing the major contenders. These election campagins very quickly degenerated into personality conflicts, muckraking and charges of misadministration.[4]

Half-way along the continuum would be some American school controversies. While these involved values such as equal opportunity and personal initiative, they nevertheless fairly quickly came to include personal attacks on teachers who had committeed moral indiscretions or engaged in 'subversive' activities. But here there was a limit on the sort of personal attacks which were permissible.

However in the Geering controversy, personality attacks tended to be avoided during the first year of the controversy. This was partly because the major participants were conscious of the ideological prohibitions on such attacks, and partly because they knew any breach of this norm would earn them the censure of those more conscious of their ideological duties. Geering was obviously unpopular with more conservative members of the church, but their official publications aimed more to discredit the theological viewpoint

4 Ibid., p.11.

he represented than criticize him personally. He was made the focus of their attack only when it seemed to them that radical excesses could be curbed in no other way. But once the level of bitterness started to rise, personal antagonisms also began to flourish. Nevertheless the fact that there was a delay in this process would suggest that at least some of the norms prescribed by the ideology, those prohibiting personal attacks, were taken seriously.

(3) Because of the importance of beliefs in the controversy it would be further expected that antagonisms would disappear more quickly once the matters in dispute had been settled.

If the participants really took their ideology seriously, they would be likely to forgive their opponents when the controversial issues had begun to fade. This seemed to happen with many of the central participants. Wardlaw, when interviewed, spoke of Geering without bitterness, and was quick to recognize his opponent's virtues. Geering was similarly fair in his comments about Wardlaw. However this forgiveness did not prove particularly contagious. Many of the lower-level participants had been politicized for the first time, and were more easily incited than controlled. Six years after the heresy trial some conservative informants still saw Geering as an agent of the devil, and some radicals continued to trade rumours about their opponents' moral lapses. This continuing bitterness was illustrated in the Presbyterian youth movement as seen by its chairman:

> The biggest single destructive force of the youth movement has been the lack of trust in people of differing Christian theological and ethical stances.

> It seems that when an event is arranged in the Presbyterian Church, we ask two questions; Who is organizing it? What is their theological viewpoint? On the basis of those answers we decide whether we can trust the event and participate in it.[5]

So when the national issues began to die down, many of the local conflagrations continued to rage unabated. At least one congregation split over the issue, although social polarization often softened the impact of such antagonisms. Thus, localized residues of bitterness remained, unaffected by the reconciliatory policies of leaders at the national level.

(4) Because of the coherence of an ideology, it would be expected that groups would disagree consistently on a wide range of issues, and therefore find it very difficult to compromise.

This was the expectation, and there was certainly an unwillingness on the part of groups to budge from strongly-held opinions. Nevertheless compromise was possible precisely because the goals of the groups were ideological rather than power-seeking or economic. This paradox can be resolved once it is realized that ideological goals are often non zero-sum; that is to say, where one group gains the other does not necessarily lose. As the result of a fluoridation controversy, for example, the water can either be fluoridated or left in its existing state. It would be physically impossible for the water of a particular locality to be both fluoridated and unfluoridated at the same time. However in an ideological controversy this is less likely to

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5 A. Taylor, President's Report, C.Y.M.P., cyclostyled sheet, June 1973.

be so; and the goals of combatants may well be compatible. In the Geering controversy itself one group was recommending tolerance of diverse opinions, while the other group was emphasizing the need to stand any new opinions against confessional statements on the issues. One group was stressing relevance for the present, the other group loyalty to the past. These opinions were not irreconcilable, and if a statement of faith was necessary to show that tolerance extended to conservative opinions as well as more liberal ones, then radicals would not seriously oppose it.

The disassociation in 1970 was a compromise of this sort. It established for conservatives that some of Geering's views were not the official dogmas of the church: this was of little consequence to radicals who never claimed that they were. It told radicals that the type of theological rethinking Geering represented was not prohibited: this did not matter to conservatives who saw disassociation as but one further step along the road towards a restoration of orthodoxy.

So despite the initial expectation, compromise was possible. Moreover it was ideology which allowed this possibility to be realized.

(5) The extremes would be more prepared to engage in various forms of exit.

Amitai Etzioni, in a study of complex organizations, suggests that groups which rely on norms to ensure compliance are more prone to rebellion and secession than groups which employ coercion or financial reward.[6] This is because, he

6 Etzioni (1961), p.105.

contends, such organizations combine high levels of consensus and commitment with low levels of constraint. A prison on the one hand does not offer its inmates the chance of leaving if they dislike the conditions; nor is it necessary that they believe in the prevailing philosophy of incarceration. A church on the other hand is a voluntary organization, which members may leave at any time, and it does require some ideological consensus from its members.

Moreover in the Presbyterian church it was quite possible to leave without incurring too many costs. In a city it might involve considerable sacrifice to withdraw from the community merely because one disagrees with a fluoridation proposal. It would noramlly be easier to stay and fight, or to use Hirschman's term, 'voice'.[7] In the religious arena, however, there were often equally acceptable alternatives to the Presbyterian church, as the constant interchange between it and other denominations testified.

This ready availability of alternative churches made conservatives unwilling to widen the theological base of the church.[8] The Presbyterian church had been founded by believers; if the doubters disliked its doctrine, they could leave. Radicals similarly saw Presbyterianism as offering a distinctive policy, one of accommodating a diversity of theological perspectives. For both groups then,

7 Hirschman (1970).

8 This follows closely Downs' prediction that in a multi-party system, parties will 'strive to distinguish themselves ideologically from each other and maintain the purity of their positions'. Downs, op.cit., p.126f.

if the church decided to deny their idea of its standards, it would be quite practicable to exit altogether. This was what Wardlaw and some of his followers did after the heresy trial,[9] and what a considerable number of his adversaries might have done had the decision gone the other way. These departures made it more possible for moderates to take over the leadership of the conservative movement again.

However there were costs involved for conservatives in leaving the church. One of these was losing the chance to bring the whole body back to orthodox doctrine rather than just a gathered remnant. Another was the practical difficulty of establishing a new sect, or joining another denomination in which one had no influence.

But there were also costs in 'voice'. Those who remained within the church to try to change its policies would have to defend themselves against the charge that they were collaborators with an apostate church, and therefore betraying their ideological convictions.

So they found an intermediate strategy, which could be called 'internal exit'[10] involving remaining formally within the church while withdrawing one's allegiance to it.

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9 Some informants suggested that Gunn encouraged others to exit, but did not have enough conviction to leave himself. A more accurate explanation would be that he was prepared to leave if his congregation would secede with him. At a congregational meeting of December 12 1967 he suggested this as a possibility, in a cyclostyled sheet he had prepared for the occasion... If the national church did not return 'to its traditional...standards', the congregation should reserve 'the right to reconsider its relationship to the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand'. This threat was deleted by 58 votes to 53 in a meeting when finished at 12.30 a.m., and saw the resignation of the Session Clerk.

10 This was similar to the strategy of 'boycott', which Hirschman describes, op.cit., p.86. The difference was that in internal exit the conservatives sacrificed nothing.

This enabled conservatives to receive the benefits of membership without accepting all of its responsibilities. They gained the advantage of full exit, because they did not comply with the decisions of Assembly if they did not like them, and withheld their budgetary contributions if they did not wish to pay them. But they also acted as full members, in that they continued to voice, very loudly their dissatisfactions. They were just as entitled to anyone else, perhaps more so, because they were not responsible for the present doctrinal anarchy.

So the extreme groups were quite prepared to exit, although they showed some imagination in the forms of exit they actually adopted.

(6) Because of its ideology, the church would be insensitive to its best organizational interests.

If it had been a business firm the APL were attempting to influence, the organization might very well have ceased to do business with them once they started to engage in internal exit. If it had been a city council, it might have prosecuted them for failure to discharge their financial duties. However, it was a church, which was also influenced by an ideology. It would certainly have been easier for the peace of the church if more extremists had left the church with Wardlaw. But they did not, and men such as Read and Wilson did everything in their power to encourage them to stay. Indeed, it was, for radicals especially, a matter of principle that men with as varied perspectives as Geering and Gunn should be included in the community of faith. As one radical put it:

> This is not because I sit lightly to the truth, but because I believe that it will be found only within the fellowship of faith. A fellowship which shows genuine openness to the Holy Spirit may expect to obtain such leading of the Spirit as will enable it to glorify God in word and life.

This opinion was shared by many others, who did not think that efficient functioning of the organization was the only goal of the church; indeed it was not necessarily a major one. Geering was of the opinion that:

> the church as it has been known to us through European Christendom is destined to die, and we must let it die... That which is permanent in the church is not its structures, its doctrinal confessions and its liturgies, but its faith and the hope and love associated with it.[11]

One president of the APL agreed that it was not of fundamental importance whether the institutional church in its present form survived.

Thus ideology had the effect of making the church rather insensitive to its organizational interests. The exit of more extremists would have been quite functional for the institutional church, but its leaders chose to follow the ideologically preferable path of reconciliation.

In conclusion, ideology did seem to play an important part in the controversy. While the dispute showed many of the patterns suggested by Coleman, it also showed noticeable differences which can be plausibly explained by the inclusion of ideology into the model. Ideology, then, was not the only motivating factor behind the actions of the participants. But it stimulated proliferation of the issues, encouraged a departure of the extremists, and finally, facilitated a resolution of the controversy.

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11 Geering (1968), 176-7.

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(2) Articles

Abbreviations

ABS	American Behavioral Scientist
AJS	American Journal of Sociology
APSR	American Political Science Review
ASQ	Administrative Science Quarterly
CH	Church History
JCR	Journal of Conflict Resolution
JOP	Journal of Politics
JRH	Journal of Religious History
JSP	Journal of Social Psychology
JSSR	Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion
P	Psychiatry
PR	Partisan Review
PSQ	Political Science Quarterly
SA	Sociological Analysis
SJT	Scottish Journal of Theology
SP	Social Problems
SR	Social Research

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